

CLASS STRUGGLE

IRAN

**WORKERS MUST MAKE
REVOLUTION PERMANENT**

**THE RANK AND FILE
MOVEMENT**

**WOMEN'S
EMANCIPATION**

BRITAIN

S.L.P. & THE FAR LEFT

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Spring 1979**



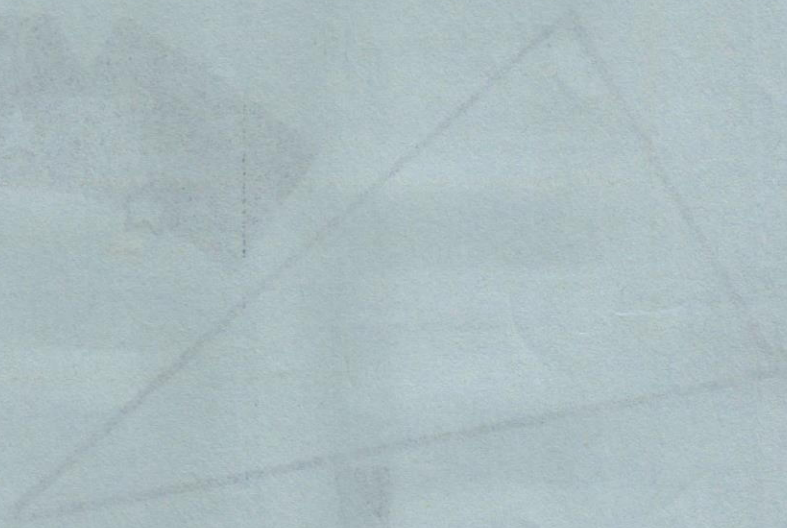
**IRISH
WORKERS
GROUP**

WORKERS MUST MAKE
REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE

THE BANK AND THE MOVEMENT

WOMEN'S
EMANCIPATION

S. L. P. & THE BANK



WOMEN'S
CROWD

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CLASS STRUGGLE is the journal of the IRISH WORKERS GROUP
a Trotskyist group in the Socialist Labour Party, and
supporter of the Workers Alliance For Action in the SLP.

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Correspondence to IWG c/o SLP, 9 Parnell Square, Dublin 1,
Ireland.

JOIN THE SOCIALIST
LABOUR PARTY AND FIGHT
FOR THE BUILDING OF A
MASS REVOLUTIONARY
WORKERS PARTY

JOIN THE TRADE UNION CAMPAIGN
AGAINST REPRESSION

Write to TUCAR at 40 Cabra Park, Dublin 7.

SLP & THE FAR LEFT

The Socialist Labour Party was proposed in October 1977 by supporters of the "Independent Labour" campaign of two left-reformist candidates in the June General Election who had been undemocratically rejected by the Leadership of the Labour Party against the wishes of their constituency members. The core supporters of that independent electoral campaign were members of the Labour Party "Liaison of the Left". They brought with them from the Labour Party a number of other activists who never belonged to Liaison some of whom purvey an electoral opportunism and a number of political positions more typical of the right of the Labour Party.

While the S.W.M. (Fraternal group of the British SWP) and the MSR (now PD and then a USFI section) and the LWR (OCRFI section) welcomed and supported or even worked for the Independent Labour campaign, the IWG opposed it with its own revolutionary perspective believing that the platform offered by the Labour breakaways in no way offered a real break with the Labour tradition towards revolutionary positions. Its perspectives were entirely on the terrain of left-reformism and could only strengthen the appeal of the bogus political solutions of the "Left Alternative" groups - Sinn Fein the Workers Party, the stalinist Communist Party and the Liaison of the Labour Left. Rather than supporting a new left-reformist obstacle for the working class the IWG believed that the disaffected Labour members should have organised a serious fight within the Labour Party against its leadership, not just in 1977 but right throughout the previous five years of sellout to Coalitionism by the Labour bureaucracy, a fight in which the support of the trade union rank and file should have been vigorously sought, especially in the affiliated unions.

While all the evidence points to opportunist trailing on the part of the SWM and MSR with regard to the Independent Labour Campaign, the deliberate tactic of the LWR fell foul of the ruthless logic of political reality in a way that clearly exposed the abstract and bankrupt nature of their call for an all-Ireland Labour Party - a slogan* to which they sacrifice the fight for a revolutionary socialist programme in the class and end by bolstering reformism, fighting to reform the Labour Party for the day when the invisible hand of the revolution will lead the masses to it and to the LWR within it.

*(Their slogan represents an organisational perspective with the sole political condition of a fight for the "All-Ireland Constituent Assembly", a demand mechanically and wrongly transposed from the 1938 Transitional programme to the Irish context where the agrarian revolution has been superseded, where bourgeois parties have been established for over 50 years and where the task of completing the anti-imperialist struggle can be posed genuinely only by a revolutionary socialist programme for workers power.)

Their support for the Independent Labour candidates was therefore an attempt to strengthen the bargaining position of the victimised Labourites for a fight against the L.P. leadership in the expectation of their return (along with expelled LWR members) to the Labour fold in possession of parliamentary seats. - A very clever manoeuvre, if

if the LWR had been correct in estimating the desperate need of the working class for the Irish Labour Party. Having gained a seat, the Independents were nevertheless not invited back into the L.P.. Labour was not unhappy about expelling them, to that LWR now had to argue hard against the formation of the SLP. But the strongly-felt need of the Irish working class for a radical break with reformism, driven home by a period of capitalist offensive and imperialist repression under Coalition and manifest in a wave of "unofficial" strikes and the demise of the Coalition, encouraged the Independents to believe that a new party could be built to answer the needs of the working class. None of the LWR's arguments against forming the SLP carried any weight with the left-reformist group they had helped to build, and the role of their supporters in the SLP ever since has been an attempt to wheel the SLP back into the Labour Party, unconditionally. If their supporters seemed to want to build the SLP it was with the sole aim of bringing an all-Ireland grouping back into the LP, there presumably to rally together in a fight against the leadership, but on no political conditions!

I.W.G.'s AIM IN JOINING THE S.L.P.

If the Independent Labour campaign had indeed represented a genuine political break with reformism the IWG would have supported it critically on the basis of our own programme as against the Labour Party. Our decision to join the SLP was the result of applying our consistent fight for a revolutionary programme and revolutionary regroupment to the new and peculiar nature of the SLP formation. For, when the Independents tested the possibility of building a new Party, it was clear from meetings that such an organisation was capable of drawing together many serious workers and many from the "far left". Most importantly in this context, its partial openness to debate on the question of programme, a debate forced open by the persistent fight of the IWG, offered the chance to argue and test a revolutionary line in an organisation moving leftwards which was broader than the whole "far left" combined.

We have in no way compromised the aims which brought us into the SLP, namely the fight for a revolutionary programme, the forging of the elements of a revolutionary Party and the fight for principled regroupment of the left. The opposition to us from the centrists, MSR, LWR and SWM, and by right wing and by Liaison leaders testifies to this.

The rest of this article lays out the major issues in the Party and the class around which the Party and the centrist left and our fight can best be assessed; but first, a brief overview of the general posture of the groups who founded the SLP.

LIAISON

The Liaison group leaders, now dominating the Party leadership, have consistently refused to assess the lessons of their own background or the political perspective which remains a "left" version of the Labour Party's reformism. The extent of their political contribution was to argue for the "radical" 1969 Labour Party programme and remain aloof from the major debates which we succeeded in focussing in terms of clear alternatives between revolutionary and reformist policies. Consistently they have attempted to balance above and aloof from the mainstream of debate, waiting for the onset of the familiar surrounds of Local Elections to rescue the Party for their perspective.

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SOCIALIST WORKERS MOVEMENT

The SWM were slow to take up open tendency rights, at first hoping to maintain by fusion with the ISP an independent group in the North and to enter the Party in the South. Having for years openly rejected the need for a revolutionary programme, contenting itself with accommodating its politics to the level of the existing struggles, its recruitment opportunism led it into the SLP as a thoroughly perspectiveless group. SWM claimed to have liquidated itself into a new broad tendency on a limited platform within the Party. In claiming to organise a broad workers' tendency in the Party it resorted to expelling IWG members from its 'founding' meeting before it began, demonstrating that it could only remain together by organisational manoeuvres which would screen it from any questioning of its record.

With its initial numerical advantage and organisational resources, SWT captured control of the Party trade union committee and the biggest blocks of space in the Party paper of which it controls editorship. Its own "magazine" Socialist Worker Review marked a continued drift rightwards even compared with its previous paper The Worker; its positions generally within the SLP reflect an opportunist accommodation to the left-reformists. Despite its broad base in the Party it has signally failed to knit together any coherent interventions by Party members on the points of the SWT platform: trade union work, the 'contraception campaign and trade union action against repression. Its failure to participate in TUCAR which it had initiated in 1976 was most notable. In all of these areas its analysis has been characterised by a formless mix of pious talk about workers and a blurring of principles. Its activity manifested an attempt (sectarian towards IWG and other tendencies) to siphon off control of party interventions into its own hands, tending thus to pose an obstacle to a broader involvement in activity by Party members in general.

MOVEMENT FOR A SOCIALIST REPUBLIC (Now Peoples Democracy)

The MSR group, active in supporting the Independent Labourites, refused to take up tendency rights in the SLP. They retained in it a group of supporters whose principal function has been to argue a capitulationist line on Republicanism, to oppose the building of a working class women's movement, and to manoeuvre SLP support for the MSR-dominated "Contraception Action Programme" which by being a non-affiliate body in any genuine sense remains a cover for the MSR's drive to build an all-class alliance of a "non-political" character.

Their apparent self-contradiction in supporting a left-unity drive prior to the SLP and subsequently thumbing their noses at a concrete possibility for left-regroupment within SLP, is explained by their imminent hope of incorporating the smaller Peoples Democracy into the USFI and secondly, by their fantasy that they were engaging the Provisional movement in debate (!) and could thus afford to ignore the "far left".

THE SLP MAY 1978 POLICY CONFERENCE

The main focus of debate in the SLP was at the May Conference to discuss, amend and adopt four draft policy documents on Women, the National Question, the Economy and Agriculture. Despite the explicit guarantee of the rights of tendencies to argue their politics in the Party, tendencies were denied the right to put forward motions except through branches. (The forthcoming annual Conference will suffer the same fate due, not least, to the determined opposition by a leading SWT member to motions from tendencies.) The large agenda last May

was not prioritised in any way by the Standing Orders (Steering) Committee and thus the attendance was subject to prolonged debate on minor points while many major issues were denied adequate time or relegated altogether. The leadership, who stood aloof from the debates to a disgraceful extent, attempted to blame the results of their own organisational dereliction - many delegates only saw the motions for the first time coming in the door - on the "dogmatism" of the tendencies without whom there would have been no debate.

But the conference organisation also reflected a cynical manoeuvre via Standing Orders Committee which was controlled - by default of others - by a leading SWT member, both in dismembering motions and in putting some of the most important where they could not be reached. His position was also abused to intervene and commit the SLP without debate to all-out opposition to nuclear power.

WOMAN'S EMANCIPATION

The IWG Action Programme (opposed by MSR for its working class focus!) was not included on the agenda even though properly submitted by a branch. Parts of it were listed as adopted by other branches or as amendments assigned by Standing Orders Cttee. to separate parts of the debate. By destroying the integrity of the document in advance, its explanatory sections were separated from its demands and its parts were buried in the confused mess that passed for a policy document on women. Out of sheer sectarianism - for they offered no alternative and no argument against its content - the SWT battled to ensure that the document would not stand to our credit for what it was, a clear, concrete guide to action on all the major aspects of woman's oppression and exploitation, bringing together the best formulations available from recent debates on woman and situating each section in briefly stated perspectives on economic equality, trade unions and women, fertility and maternity leave, child-care and domestic labour, personal independence and equality, and the struggle for democratic rights and against imperialism. With reference to the document SWT wrote in a background paper which gave no arguments or alternatives: "We oppose any programme for activity which runs to 27 points or more"! Their notion of an action programme for party members on the whole woman question amounted to naming four campaigns without giving any perspective or content to them.

The result of the debate was a policy document fundamentally confused and adaptable to almost any course of action.

In addition to fighting for a clear charter of action (a battle lost to manoeuvres and not in debate) the IWG proposed a policy document or theoretical perspective alternative to the one offered in the name of the NEC and drafted under MSR influence. In brief our proposal argued

- (1) to situate the Party's perspective on women in the revolutionary socialist tradition associated with Marx, Engels, Lenin, Zetkin and Trotsky;
- (2) that the basis of sexual oppression is class society;
- (3) that recognising the oppression of all women, working class women (alongside small-farm women) are exploited as a class, all the more too because of imperialism;
- (4) that a programme for women's emancipation must be based in a working class perspective of independent class unity as against the class-collaborationist feminism and bankruptcy of the existing womens groups;
- (5) that the central strategy must be the building of an independent working class women's movement and the winning of it to the revolutionary socialist programme and revolutionary leadership.

The opposition of SWT to this document, as befits a left group with one of the worst records on the woman question, was wholesale opposition on trivial details, especially considering what they supported as against it.

The MSR supporters resorted to the crudest misrepresentation of our document, as did the MSR paper subsequently, depicting it as a "sectarian" and "workers-only" perspective. Their arguments against what the document actually said, however, destroy their "socialist" credentials even more than their unprincipled lies. They opposed the building of a working-class women's movement. They opposed orienting campaigns on women's issues to the labour movement. They opposed arguing for a revolutionary socialist strategy in the struggle for women's emancipation. In their desperation to reject any perspective opposed to their 'non-political' "autonomous women's movement", they did not protest at the charge that their perspective was one of class-collaboration. Somehow that didn't matter because of the "specific oppression of women", or in other words, despite all their token acceptance of its roots in class society, for them women's oppression is actually a function of the biological differences between the sexes rather than a function of different class interests. Their "strategy" for women's emancipation can have no other theoretical basis, for they exalt feminism and insist on the necessity of its political autonomy (in a class society!). They appear to have learnt nothing of the revolutionary communist tradition on woman's emancipation.

MSR supporters in the SLP have frequently claimed that the defeat of our document at the conference (this one was debated at length but few had had a chance to read it!) signified acceptance of their perspective. But despite their dominant position in drafting the final document, they did not argue in it, or by amendment, for the strategy they claim to believe in. Instead they contrived a hotch-potch addendum which can be all things to all people:

"Therefore the SLP supports the independent organisation of women in women's groups and shall actively participate in these groups as well as in the women's liberation movement and the labour movement".

Subsequently the SWT, apparently realising how they had capitulated to the MSR, did a sharp turn (in words only) in the next issue of their magazine. In this they suddenly proclaimed the need for a "working women's movement" under the banner of "revolutionary feminism", a slogan that no more represents a socialist strategy than does "revolutionary nationalism". By thus opportunistically retaining the banner of "feminism" they hoped to dignify a policy of recruitment opportunism vis a vis petty-bourgeois feminist groups, not excluding the North where such groups have no concrete possibility of developing a following against the background of republican anti-woman ideology and the heightened role of the family in the anti-imperialist war.

A B O R T I O N

The IWG has never weakened in its call for abortion on demand as a democratic right and a concrete necessity for women in Ireland. We have insisted on making propaganda publicly for this demand in our leaflets and publications and we have consistently urged a fight for the right to argue for this perspective in the more mobilising campaigns such as for contraception on demand. In this we have been ridiculed and blocked at every level of the Party, not least by fake "trotskyists". Nor did we relent in this battle within

the SLP even if it only meant locating another handful of activists prepared to lay the ground for a campaign on abortion. It is a measure of the political backwardness of the far left that even self-styled revolutionaries tried to block debate on the motion which we carried in three SLP branches for defence of all women who have had abortions (because in Ireland they are regarded in law as child murderers), and the motion we carried in two SLP branches for abortion on demand. SWT and MSR backed a motion to divert the issue into an "impartial(sic) internal education programme" before taking a position, "because of the emotive nature" of the issue! Our principled stand was vindicated in the best debate of the conference when those present voted by 74 to 47 in favour of our motion for abortion on demand. Hands which had gone up against abortion 6 months previously among the far-left groups and more recently in the branches were shamed into changing sides by sheer weight of support from the floor. The existence of 10,000 women in Ireland who have secretly had abortions over 5 or 6 years was an objective factor that helped clinch the argument. But conference did not stop at defence of these women. It followed the political logic through to demanding the right to abortion for all women, a right exercised by millions of women every year worldwide.

The Party leadership are naturally terrified of the implications of such a position for the SLP in Irish society and already a right-wing caucus is afoot to reverse the position. The leadership are determined that there will be no campaign on the issue. It must be recorded, however, that they have the collusion of SWT and MSR supporters. The SWT editor of the Party paper denied publication to an IWG article on how to argue for the abortion perspective in the context of the contraception campaign. The MSR pleaded that of course they support the demand but "it is premature. It should be noted that we have argued not for an immediate campaign on the issue but to prepare the ground for such by raising the perspective in present campaign forums. The LWR supporters backed our motion, but they have never put forward an action perspective on the woman question in their journal, as indeed they in general in our view refuse to fight concretely for a revolutionary socialist programme.

As for the objective need for the campaign for abortion, however difficult it may be to prepare a basis for it, to those who say it is premature to even raise the issue we put the question:- who if not the marxists will ever create the politically conscious basis for such a campaign? And if you believe, as we do not, that in a period of deepening economic crisis objective conditions can still bring about a spontaneous move among women towards this demand, have socialists nevertheless not an obligation to ensure that they and their programme will be the basis for leading such a movement and not bourgeois or reformist leaders?

There have been resignations from the SLP because of its abortion demand, and indeed the growing hopes of the leadership in electoral opportunism inevitably poses the danger that the Party will backtrack on this issue, threatened in the Local Elections with a concerted offensive by Church and State and most if not all of the other parties. Caught between attempts to either hide or revoke the demand, the SLP has no escape from the fact that it has even for a short while upheld a position that is anathema to all bourgeois and reformist currents in Ireland. There is only one way forward for the SLP - and it is not principally the abortion demand that raises the question, though it does it very sharply.

That way forward is: reject the left-reformist leadership, turn the party outwards to the class in a serious fight for its best demands, and begin to build the elements of a revolutionary party cadre trained in the marxist method.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The lack of prioritisation of the May Conference agenda allowed the relegation of key motions promoted by IWG on Republicanism, on the Workers Government and on an Action Programme on the National Question to the end of the debates. Only the action programme was reached under such pressure of time that only two speakers were allowed on it, with SWT opposing it solely on the grounds that it laid down conditions to safeguard democracy and political independence of socialists in any proposed united front with republicans and anti-imperialists.

The failure to address the question of maintaining political independence in joint campaigns - the classic position of the united front for the imperialist epoch - against repression has paralysed and defocussed the Party in all its day-to-day involvements with anti-repression work, trailing after the humanitarian and republican Relatives Action Committees on the one hand, running into open division over participation in joint marches, doing nothing towards organising trade unionists against repression through TUCAR, and half-approving the proliferation of isolated often baseless single-issue ventures.

REPUBLICANISM

The Party's attitude to Republicanism was not debated because of the agenda arrangement. The result has been a vague and evasive orientation which allowed leading members publicly to attack the Provos as a cause of the problem in a manner similar to the attacks by Imperialist agents. The position tabled by IWG, but which was not debated, addressed itself to the very issues that erupted later when left undefined. The SWT, MSR and LWR supporters never openly argued for support in principle for armed struggle. When our motion was later considered, having been referred to the national executive, the SWT NEC representative made it known that they do not give even conditional support to the Provos "in so far as they take the struggle forward", but merely "defence" - an evasion at root. He rejected as too remote also our laying out of a perspective explaining the necessary strategic connection between the anti-imperialist movement and the fight for workers' power. In the following excerpt from the motion we put forward, one finds the only explicit defence of armed struggle against the British Army and the only explicit rejection of calls for a ceasefire argued by any grouping at that Conference. (Events since have forced SWT to table words to the same effect for the forthcoming conference). None of the "trotskyists" supported this as a Party position:

"While in no way supporting the call for a ceasefire, we call for an end to the bombing campaign and for the building of a mass political movement, against imperialism and the Northern State, based upon the organised working class North and South.

Only on this basis can we

- (1) build the armed front of workers, socialists and republicans
- (2) build revolutionary workers' councils
- (3) prepare the mobilisation of the masses for a general strike
- (4) fight for an all-Ireland government of workers' parties to defend every gain by the masses in struggle
- (5) smash both states and replace them with the class rule of

the Workers' Republic, the dictatorship of the proletariat. "While it is impossible at present to build workers councils or to call for a general strike etc., it is necessary for the Party to spell out this perspective of how we see a united front and the struggle against imperialism leading to a Workers' Republic. If we fail to do this we fail to outline our real alternative for militant Republican workers"

THE NEED FOR A MARXIST PROGRAMME

The Party leadership stayed aloof from the debate on the National Question - on which they are divided in their attitude to the Provos. The shame of the self-styled trotskyst SWT is that they give a left cover to the evasions of the leadership. Nowhere have they sharply argued a clear alternative to left-reformism. Why? Because their recruitment opportunism dictates that they must play dodgems with any issue that might dent their soft radical image. Lacking any conception of marxist method, though they are hardly ignorant of the need for revolutionaries to cut against the grain, they reject explicitly the need to advance a revolutionary programme. The sheer philistinism of centrists, who in Trotsky's words "adopt every week new haphazard fragments of Marx and Lenin to their current needs", necessitates the SWT's rejection of any need at all for a programme. More fundamentally, this 'position' disguises a total lack of marxist method which alone is capable in each epoch of re-elaborating an adequate and concrete programme, a method worked out through the struggles of millions of workers in the building of four successive Internationals.

SWT accuses IWG of "programme fetishism" solely as a means of disguising their abandonment of the marxist method, for they can adduce no evidence that any of the positions we argued were irrelevant or abstract, or that we ever made acceptance of our programme a condition of joint action on immediate issues. Indeed it is precisely the failure to seriously take up the elements of a revolutionary programme for which we did argue that leaves the SLP floundering on all the major questions - women, republicanism, the united front, repression, the rank and file, and elections. What do the SWT claim as their method? To learn from the working class, they say. But if socialists do not bring to bear on the situation of the class a theory and method rooted in the revolutionary socialist tradition, what can they possibly learn? More importantly, what can they teach? To conclude Trotsky's quote: "workers can learn nothing from these people".

THE RANK AND FILE

Pretensions to champion the building of a rank and file movement forced the SWT to engage in debate on this issue at the conference more than on any other issue. The basic position for discussion was laid down by IWG members in drafting committee and by winning our line at the founding conference on some of the major elements of a rank and file programme. SWT chose to oppose us on the terrain of the programme for transforming the labour movement.

We argued, four-square with the tradition of the third and fourth Internationals, to put the labour movement on a war footing "against the capitalist offensive". SWT battled successfully and hard on a deceptively trivial formulation, to delete this phrase and reduce the whole purpose of a rank and file movement to the following: "in order to achieve democracy and ensure that the unions fight in the interests of their members".

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There could hardly be a more complete abandonment of a political perspective for the rank and file movement! Not only does it fetishise an empty formal notion of democracy abstracted from any concept of what the rank and file must organise around in struggle, but it subordinates the rank and file movement to the unions as they exist under capitalism-domesticating agents of the bourgeoisie in the working class. The transformation of the union movement is possible only on the basis of a programme and perspective for the rank and file, which, if successfully argued for and taken up, leads the class step by step from immediate struggles to pose the question of workers power.

Such a perspective means transforming the unions into revolutionary organs as far as possible on a programme of struggle, but in no way accepting confinement of the rank and file by them. Radically new organisational forms will be necessary both to advance the struggle and to prepare the building of workers councils as organs of power; but organisational or democratic reforms not connected to the fight for a transitional programme remain empty recipes. A leading SWT member illustrated the fecklessness of their perspective when "explaining" why their rank and file initiative (New Liberty) in the Irish Transport Union had declined. It was not for the want of a correct programme, he maintained, (a contradiction in terms), but because the ITGWU bureaucracy was too strong and well able to crush it. But was it not precisely the need to oppose that powerful bureaucracy that they cited as the reason for building New Liberty in the first place?

In practice the SWT's monopoly of the indecisive SLP trade union committee cannot be blamed entirely for the disarray of Party activity in the unions. The central problem has again been the leadership's failure to make political intervention a priority, even over mere administration, in the leading bodies of the Party. But we predict that all the pleas of administrative burden will evaporate when it comes to opportunist electioneering throughout the spring.

PARTY PAPER

The period of the SLP's existence has been one of unprecedented growth in rank and file trade union militancy. Against such a background the Party's failure is all the more inexcusable. The Party Paper gives the appearance of considerable involvement, but the articles amount with few exceptions, to mere journalistic commentary. This is a reflection of an economistic attitude which tails workers' disputes in practice, confining perspectives to solidarity work within the limited spontaneous basis of each dispute. But the presentation of most disputes in Socialist Labour also reflects a refusal to argue politically or agitationally with the workers who are expected to read it. The SWT editor of the paper has exercised a considerable monopoly of its columns. Of all the articles "commissioned" from party members not a single approach has been made to an IWG member. Five articles by IWG members have been refused publication, and so far, not a single defence has been offered despite motions and letters demanding explanation.

Most importantly, where an SLP branch was deeply involved in urging a fight against redundancy at the locked-out Tynagh mines, under the lead of IWG members, three articles were successively rejected by Socialist Labour. In order to stave off the growing resentment of such crude censorship the Editor has recently furnished us with an unsigned piece of journalese which negates the whole meaning of the

backed this intervention only to be greeted with silence from
Socialist Labour.

CONCLUSION

greeted with silence from

sues of the day!

...sues of the day!

clearly seen where the blame lies.

The degeneration and decomposition in the Party membership is a

the communist tradition. The Chinese revolution is a revolution of the people, and the people are the main force in the revolution. The Chinese revolution is a revolution of the people, and the people are the main force in the revolution.

IRAN

WORKERS MUST MAKE THE REVOLUTION 'PERMANENT'

The prolonged revolutionary situation in Iran holds enormous potential for destabilising Western imperialism economically and politically. Carter and Owen, those sermonisers on 'human' rights and christian values, know that there are serious interests at stake in Iran. Serious enough for them to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Shah as he sheds rivers of blood to preserve the most savage tyranny on the planet. For this reason the Shah's huge army has 1,200 military and 7,500 civilian American 'advisors'. The notorious SAVAK, set up in 1957 and reconstructed after the 1963 upheavals, has between thirty and sixty thousand men. It was 'advised' at all stages by the FBI and the CIA who have 50 top agents in SAVAK.

This enormous apparatus of repression was built up by the US and Britain to serve their economic and strategic interests. Iran yields massive super-profits. One British businessman is reported as saying that he 'makes 40% more profit here than in Britain'. At the heart of these interests is the oil industry. It supplies 13% of American and 17% of UK imports. Although formally nationalised, the consortium which controls it is 40% British and 40% US in composition. These are the 'British and Western interests' that Dr. David Owen talks about defending.

Even more important than the oil wealth and investments of Iran is its strategic position. Groomed by the US and Britain to play the role of policeman of the Gulf area in the 'indirect' or 'neo-colonial' system which replaced the direct British military presence after 1968, the Shah's forces have seen service against the liberation forces in Oman.

The overthrow of this regime holds incalculable consequences for imperialism - hence the flood of telegrams of support for the Shah from Whitehall and the White House.

Much of the Iranian left refer to the Shah's regime as 'fascist'. This is incorrect. The restoration of the Shah in 1953, by a military coup assisted by the CIA, initiated a military bonapartist tyranny of unusual severity. This regime represented the political expropriation of the bourgeoisie and feudal landowning class in order to preserve capitalism in the interests of imperialism and against the working class. The Shah's regime rests upon imperialism externally, and internally upon an artificially induced impasse in the class struggle.

ROOTS OF THE CRISIS

The Shah has given, in a deformed way, certain social concessions to the various classes- land reform to the peasants, industrial development to the bourgeoisie. Political rights and expressions were, however, totally forbidden. The massive apparatus of repression is a testimony to the lack of a solid social base for the Shah's regime. It is this social basis which real fascism possesses in the enraged reactionary petit-bourgeoisie and lumpen proletariat. Both these classes are,

however, in the forefront of the opposition movement. They figure among those most bitterly opposed to the present regime.

Since the sixties there has been a considerable growth of industry - petrochemicals, steel, car, truck and bus production and assembly, electronics and machine tools. As a result the Iranian industrial proletariat has grown in size (2.5 million in 1977).

Yet despite all this the Iranian economy found itself in deep crisis by 1977. Partly this was the effect of the world capitalist crisis, partly the accumulation of contradictions engendered in Iran's mode of industrialisation.

Firstly, the Agrarian Reform the Shah had imposed after 1962 was typical of a 'revolution from above' - of Bonapartist land reforms which, while weakening the old landowning class and opening agriculture to capitalism, in fact swindles the vast majority of the peasantry leaving them landless (50%) or with tiny plots (30%). The reform was designed to strengthen those peasants who already owned land and implements and draught animals.

The net result has been the creation of two 'new' classes in the countryside, capitalist landowners and landless labourers. However, the result has not been a rapid capitalisation and modernisation of agriculture. Land has been abandoned, villages deserted and the result has been rocketing imports of foodstuffs plus a flooding into the cities of the rural unemployed.

Secondly, there has been a tendency for the effects of the political regime to siphon off an increasing proportion of the oil revenue - arms and military spending and corruption. The failure to develop a skilled labour force also places severe limits on Iran's development.

The crisis of 1977/78 took the form of escalating inflation, food prices and rents, in particular, soaring. This affected the whole urban population.

THE BAZAAR

The bazaar was, until the 1950s and '60s the centre of urban economic life. Dominated by very wealthy merchants but consisting of its overwhelming bulk of one and a half million shopkeepers, money lenders, traders, craftsmen and artisans, it had in the past funded trade and been the centre of much production and nearly all exchange.

The foreign banks, the industrial production of consumer goods, the large stores have all undermined and threatened the traditional way of life and culture of the bazaar. This traditional culture is deeply Moslem. Its ideologists and leaders are the mullahs, its cultural and political centre the mosque. Shiia Islam represents a unifying ideology, one that in 1963 and 1978 has spearheaded mass resistance to the Shah's regime.

Shiia Islam has its origins in resistance to the constituted state authority, founded as it is on allegiance to the deposed and martyred son-in-law of the prophet, Ali. Its most sacred figure after the prophet is the Iman Hossein murdered by the tyrannical Caliph Yazid, an event commemorated by the 'days of mourning' of early December (Moharram). It also has a pronounced millenarian aspect. Believers expect the 'return' of the twelfth Imman who will institute a pure Islamic order. Shiia is much less attuned to the state than Sunni Islam. Indeed it is

headed by a powerful and independent caste of mullahs (180,000 of them) with a hierarchy of Ayatollahs the leader of whom, Khomeini, was elected in 1962.

The reality of the Religious Opposition leaders is at variance with the Carter/Owen picture of them as reactionary fanatics who want to take Iran back to the seventh century. Khomeini insists: "I have always called strongly for economic and social development in my country", and espouses what he calls 'the principles of democracy and freedom'. By this he appears to mean a republic based on universal suffrage and with freedom for political parties. "...the Marxist will be free to express themselves because we are convinced that Islam contains the answer to the peoples needs. Our faith is capable of standing up against their ideology" (Le Monde, Paris, May 6th 1978). Khomeini can sum up his aim thus. "As soon as the Shah goes we want the creation of an Islamic republic based on the popular vote" (Le Monde, November 8th 1978). It is precisely the 'Islamic' nature of this state that holds the greatest dangers.

THE SHI'ITE VETO

Whilst Khomeini has made it clear that he is not thinking of a regime like Saudi-Arabia or Pakistan, he obviously intends to instal in a future constitution provisions which give the Shia hierarchy a veto on legislation similar to that embodied in the 1906 Constitution. The non-Persian nationalities, the non-Shia religious minorities, and women, could expect little that is 'liberal' or 'democratic' in such a regime.

What Khomeini does loudly and vociferously attack is American Imperialism. He declares his support for the Palestinians. All these factors suggest that a Khomeini-influenced regime would be of a populist Islamic nationalist type. To draw parallels with Pakistan or Indonesia is a mistake. Both these dictatorships were established in the defeat of a popular upsurge where the working class were unable to seize power.

Islamic ideology is Janus-Faced. It can justify anti-imperialism, resistance to the foreign powers seeking to exploit or dismember the states of the Middle East. It can also justify black reaction - the suppression of the working class and poor peasantry. The inner connection is that like all religions it defends private property. As long as the possessing classes of the imperialised nation feel the major threat to their property to lie with imperialism then they can play a vigorous role in the struggle against it. Islamic ideology will then have a 'progressive' populist coloration and orientation. When the working class or small peasants become a serious threat not only to imperialism but to the native larger property owners it can become a cloak for Bonapartist military dictatorship or even fascist reaction (as in Turkey).

Khomeini's movement can therefore not be defined by adding up progressive democratic points as against reactionary points. The USFI and the International Spartacist Tendency both use this method but get different answers to the sum. The USFI gets the answer that Khomeini is a 'progressive force', a democrat. The Spartacist find that he is a 'black reactionary'. One plays into the hands of the mullahs, the other into the hands of the Carter and Owen propaganda for the Shah. Neither is of use to Iranian revolutionary communists who have to win the masses now under religious leadership or influence to the perspective of proletarian revolution.

For those who see all evil as lying in the religious ideology of the opposition, the secular 'Union of National Front Forces' led by Karim Sanjabi might seem to be a 'democratic' force of the sort Marxists could fight alongside of. This party of the large bazaar merchants, some industrialists and the professional middle class cloaks itself in the bourgeois-nationalist mantle of Mossadeq, the prime minister overthrown by the CIA in 1953. But it is the most compromised and half-hearted force in the opposition. Its leaders' names figure largely on the 'list of 80 names' the Shah has been pondering over as candidates to a government of 'national reconciliation'. Sanjabi is one of the three politicians most frequently closetted with the Shah. The religious oppositionists know their measure. The Ayatollah of Abadan commented "Sanjabi and Bazargan at heart want to negotiate with the Shah. These men are bourgeois. We only have confidence in Khomeini for only he really wants the Shah to go" (Le Monde, November 6th, 1978).

The aspirations and mentality of the Iranian bourgeoisie is well expressed in the statement of a business man to the Le Monde correspondent, "But where is the intransigence of the Ayatollah Khomeini going to lead? The Shah is on his knees. The Ayatollah should take advantage of it to impose on him respect for, and consolidation of, the constitution we obtained from Sharif Emani's government and which General Azhari's cabinet is in the process of taking back". It is obvious that the 'democratic rights' these gentlemen desperately want are the posts of imperial ministers for themselves.

However, as with the religious leaders it is not merely their class or caste interest or personal inclination which has determined their actions. The mass mobilisations have kept Sanjabi out of office just as they have radicalised the mullahs.

If the first wave of the Iranian revolution was spearheaded by the intellectuals -writers and students and centred on the universities; if the second wave, starting with the demonstrations and massacre in Qom on 9th of January 1978 marked the passage of the movement to the phase of 'religious leadership', then October and November of 1978 showed the emergence of the Iranian proletariat as the key force capable of toppling the Shah.

THE PROLETARIAT

The Iranian proletariat has a history of militant trade union and socialist organisation. The first unions in Iran were set up by workers returning from the Baku oilfields in Russia after the defeat of the 1905 revolution. The young labour movement participated in the 1907-09 revolution in Iran. After the war a communist party was formed and some of the trade unions affiliated to the Red International of Labour Unions in 1921. The Pahlavi dictatorship crushed all independent workers' organisations in 1928.

In 1944 an Iranian TUC was formed under communist influence. By 1946 it had a membership of 400,000. Fifty thousand workers celebrated May Day in Tehran in 1946. But the slavishly pro-Soviet politics of the Communist Party (Tudeh), which had 25,000 members, ruined this movement. They held back the strike wave while the Soviet Union was haggling with the British and Americans over the Kurdistan and Azerbaijan republics which had been set up in the North. Stalin traded these republics for oil and gas concessions in Iran.

The Tudeh was initially hostile to Mossadeq (from the right, because his policies threatened to upset the Soviet-Imperialist status quo) but it moved to a full popular-frontist tailing of his bourgeois nationalism. It missed the crucial opportunity of mounting resistance to the coup of August 1953 and witnessed the immediate smashing of the trade unions and in 1955 the uncovering of its illegal and military organisations. ~~The~~ Tudeh was almost completely obliterated by SAVAK.

Only in September 1978 did a section of the party decide to reconstitute a 'party of the interior'. According to Le Monde (Dec. 6th 1978) "they admit that the reconstruction of the apparatus and the setting up of a serious organisation will take several years". Though this statement speaks volumes for Stalinist bureaucratism and inertia it also bears witness to the decay into which Tudeh has fallen. An added reason for such modest perspectives is that Moscow has by no means given the go-ahead for full-blooded participation in the overthrow of the Shah. Brezhnev's non-aggression pact with the Shah and his imperialist backers cripples the Tudeh as a party of the insurgent proletariat.

Yet despite the bankruptcy and destruction of the historic leaders, the Iranian proletariat has started to play an ever more decisive role. The atrocity of the cinema fire in Abadan revealed the depths of savagery of the Shah's regime to the oil workers and started their self-organisation.

The strike movement in the oilfields bears all the marks of the spontaneous revolutionising of the workers. On October 23rd the 12,000 workers at the Oil Refinery in Abadan came out on strike for economic demands. These were conceded in 3 days. After the return to work mass meetings ensued, students being present at the discussion of political questions. On the 29th, mass meetings formulated political demands:

"Abolition of Martial Law,
Freeing of political prisoners,
The disbandment of SAVAK
The departure of American advisors,
A fight against corruption,
The conviction of all those who have committed
crimes against the people."

The strike has ebbed and flowed since then with thousands of troops driving workers at gun point into the refineries. Those inside have slowed production to a snail's pace. BBC correspondents in late December reported the formation of factory or plant committees.

In Teheran the bank workers have not only struck but begun to exercise elements of inspection. They have **revealed**, for example, a list of 180 named people prominent in the regime who had transferred 4.2 billion dollars out of Iran. The newspaper workers have fought bitter battles for the freedom to report the events of the Autumn.

M U T I N I E S

The working class is participating wholeheartedly in the struggle to bring down the Shah. Indded, it alone has the economic strength and social cohesion to do this. The mass strike wave has put the noose around the Shah's neck and is tightening it. Strike committees are springing up in the struggle. They must, at the earliest opportunity, be generalised into city-wide workers' councils. The morale of the army is **already** weakened. In Tabriz on 18th December, a unit downed arms and joined demonstrators with their armoured cars. The formation

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and arming of workers' militia as army discipline breaks down is crucial. So too is the creation of barrack committees and soldiers' councils.

ANTI-IMPERIALIST UNITED FRONT

Iranian revolutionary communists must develop the strategy and tactics which the working class must employ to overthrow the Shah and smash the monstrous machinery of repression. This means marching alongside the 'religious opposition'. Its central and most deeply felt immediate demands, the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty, the smashing of SAVAK, the release of all political prisoners, free elections and freedom of political parties, the nationalisation of British and American monopolies are national-revolutionary and bourgeois-democratic demands that the proletariat must support. To this extent an anti-imperialist united front is possible. However, the religious leaders are, and will prove themselves to be, uncertain and treacherous allies. Khomeini has declared himself against any co-operation with communists, 'even to bring down the Shah'. His 'democratic' programme would enshrine a religious obscurantism in a new constitution. Should the working class appear to threaten Iranian, moslem, private property (including the massive riches of the mosques) but prove unable to draw the non-proletarian masses behind it and seize power, then Khomeini or another religious leader could use the petty-bourgeoisie and lumpenproletariat as fascist terror squads against the workers. Alternatively the Ulema could sanctify a new military dictatorship. At the moment, however, these masses, with all their religious prejudices, have democratic aspirations, that is, they believe that democratic rights will alleviate social needs. If Khomeini reconciled himself to an 'Islamic' military dictatorship immediately the Shah fell, he would undoubtedly lose his mass following rapidly.

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS AND THE RIGHTS OF NATIONALITIES

It is illusions in the anti-imperialist and democratic credentials of Khomeini and the mullahs that revolutionaries must challenge. To do this means participation by Iranian Trotskyists in the struggles launched by those leaders, under clear, independent slogans with full warnings about the religious leaders. Democratic demands have enormous importance. Correctly and fully posed they can win first the proletariat and then other oppressed strata away from the religious and bourgeois leadership. The working class is and can be the only consistently democratic force. The demands that they fight for must include, freedom of speech, assembly and the press, legality for trade unions, and political parties and the right to strike. The question of Iran's national minorities must not be forgotten, the Shah's empire is a 'prison house of nationalities'. Only 50% of Iran's population speak Farsi (Persian) though another two related languages make up another 11%. The rest belong to distinct national ethnic groups, Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Baluchis and Arabs. The right to self-determination, up to and including separation, must be defended by the Iranian proletariat. They must support any national uprising of these peoples.

WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION

Likewise, Iranian revolutionaries must fight for the full democratic rights of women and their emancipation from the age-old restrictions imposed by religion as well as the state. The right to own and dispose of property, entry to all occupations, equal rights in the family, in sum, full legal equality in all spheres. Women have been active

participants in the movement against the Shah. The religious leaders have tried to limit them to propagating the idea of a full return to the veil and the full rigours of Islamic law. Women must be won to the side of the only class capable of gaining not only their equal rights, but via the destruction of capitalism, achieving their full social emancipation.

THE PEASANTRY

A clear majority of Iran's population is rural, consisting of landless or small-land-owning peasants. The proletariat must raise the slogan 'the land to the people who till it'. Partly of the reason for the stability of the Pahlavi dynasty and for the effectiveness of the army as an instrument of repression, is the quiescence of the peasantry. In early December, the Shah is reported to have anxiously asked a visitor 'But are the peasants also against me? (Le Monde 6.12.78). The workers must encourage peasant seizure of large estates belonging to the old aristocracy, the Imperial family, the court clique and the foreign agricultural enterprises. Whether an individual or a collective form of land ownership prevails will depend on the time scale of the proletarian seizure of power.

MOSQUE AND STATE

There are numerous religious minorities in Iran, Sunni Moslems, Armenians, Jews, Bahais etc. A Shi'ite republic would be oppressive to them as well as to women and the working class. Therefore, the demand for complete secularisation, the separation of Mosque and State is vital. The proletariat does not seek to trample on the religious scruples of any grouping where these affect only believers and do not violate the democratic rights of others.

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AND PERMANENT REVOLUTION

All these democratic demands culminate in the demand for a constituent assembly, elected by full suffrage and with full powers, that is, with no committee of ulemas to vet its actions. These demands, consistently and vigorously fought for, would enable the vanguard of the proletariat to rally behind it the social forces to ensure that the revolutionary process which has opened up in Iran, is not aborted in the form of an Islamic military Bonapartism, or of an inherently unstable bourgeois democracy with enormous concessions to Shi'ite theocracy. The Iranian revolution, if it is to accomplish even its anti-imperialist and democratic tasks, must become proletarian. However, the 'revolution in permanence' of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky is not an unconscious process. It necessitates a bolshevik vanguard party which has won the leadership of an armed working class organised in Soviets. To this task Iranian revolutionaries must devote themselves. Communists throughout the world must render them every assistance.

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The above article appeared in Workers Power (paper) No. 3 in January 1979, the organ of IWG's fraternal organisation in Britain. The Political Committee of the IWG fully supports the line of the article.

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THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN BRITAIN

BRITISH CAPITAL IN CRISIS

British Capitalism, once the heartland of world imperialism, now stands as a weak link in the chain of world economy. During the 20th century, the economic, political and military predominance of the British bourgeoisie has steadily declined. Throughout the 1950s and '60s British capitalism became increasingly uncompetitive, particularly in comparison with the developing capitalisms in Western Europe and Japan.

The root of Britain's crisis stems from its imperial past. The imperialist legacy has meant a historical reliance by the bourgeoisie in Britain on 'invisible exports', on finance capital, foreign investment in a subordinated world. Historically the tasks of domestic industrial investment have, proportionately, tended to be played down by a bourgeoisie which, for a considerable period, was able to adopt other strategies to amass wealth. In the period since the war this has meant a failure to restructure investment in the manner of Germany, France and Japan.

In the 1960s the backwardness of British industry, its uncompetitive nature in an economy deeply dependent on trade, heightened not only a severe crisis of competition for the bourgeoisie but also the urgent need to recycle and restructure industry. With antiquated machinery, low levels of investment, the productivity of British workers was necessarily low - it rose at an average of only 2.2% per annum between 1951 and 1962. When labour productivity was boosted (it rose by an average 4.1% between 1962 and '75) the structure and proportions of Britain's industrial investment effectively prevented British capitalism from reaping any real benefits. Between 1961 and 1974 net investment in industry actually declined as a percentage of Gross National Product, from 8.2% to 6.3%.

This structural crisis of British capitalism has been exacerbated by a series of factors. The world recession of 1974/75 revealed the extent of the weakness and problems of the British bourgeoisie.

1. The decision of the British bourgeoisie to join the EEC - a clear admission of the untenability of the old imperial strategy - saw them clearly incapable of remaining independent of either Europe or America. The old strategy had meant cheap foodstuffs exploited from the areas of 'empire'. The decision to seek refuge in Europe had its price. The loss of a number of sources of cheap foodstuffs and raw materials pushed up British inflation rates considerably. In 1975 Britain had the highest inflation rate for foodstuffs of all the major powers.
2. The proportions of state expenditure, particularly non-productive, has grown considerably in Britain, partially in response to working class pressure, partly to hold up uncompetitive and inadequate portions of the economic infrastructure. The percentage change in the ratio of non-industrial to industrial employment in Britain was 33.9% between '61 and '74 compared with 14.2% in W.Germany and 18.6% in France; such expenditure has hived off capital desperately needed to restructure and organise British capital.

3. The declining British bourgeoisie, faced with massive investment disproportions, found itself straddled with a currency, the pound sterling, still standing as a world reserve currency. The competitive weakness of British capitalism found its expression in the diminishing value of the pound. This meant that foreign investments decline in value, that Britain's fragile balance of payments was shattered by escalating import bills.

Not surprisingly, such an economy depending heavily on foreign trade was thrown into sharp crisis by the sharpening of competition and rivalry in the 1974-75 recession. Unlike the Japanese, German or US economies, British capitalism did not experience so severe a decline in growth rates, but inflation, a drastic decline in currency value, a deepening of Britain's balance of payment crisis, served to intensify the search by the British bourgeoisie for new answers to their deep rooted problems.

Two other dimensions are central to Britain's crisis:

1. The crisis of imperialist rule in Ireland since the late '60s. Britain's plans for restructuring its exploitation of Ireland as a whole, for freeing itself from the anachronistic restrictions imposed by the Northern Ireland sectarian state, collapsed in the face of protestant resistance to a cold dismantling of the worst features of this state, and the catholic population's determination not to be bought off by a few empty reforms. The British bourgeoisie and their state forces faced by a massive upsurge of the nationalist population were forced back into their old role of vicious repression. At every key point their long-term strategy was contradicted by the tactics necessary to prevent the situation getting out of hand.

For British capitalism in crisis, this meant a severe financial strain both in terms of paying for minimal reforms and maintaining a large repressive apparatus. The impasse of the agreed bourgeois strategy (that is, dismantling the Orange state and a closer alliance with the Green bourgeoisie of the South) leads to sharpening conflicts and confusion within the ruling class as to how to extricate itself from this situation.

2. The organisations of the British working class, developed and strengthened in the relative boom and stability of the 1950s and '60s, remained resilient to attempts to legally shackle them or force them to pay, to the degree necessary, for the crisis of British capitalism.

With an increasingly unstable world economy, Britain's crisis was severe. The need to fund a massive programme of investment to offset the declining competitiveness of whole sections of British industry, the imported pressures of currency decline and commodity inflation, the strength of working class organisation, promoted a major argument among the British bourgeoisie as to their way forward.

THE WORKING CLASS IN THE RECENT PERIOD

The British working class faces the developing period of social crisis with all the accumulated strengths and weaknesses of its history. The world's first industrial proletariat, it created the first working class movement - both political and economic - the early trade unions and the Chartists. From the union movement emerged a skilled stratum of 'labour aristocrats' whose leaders, full-time officials, crystallised into a conservative bureaucracy undoing the work of the Chartists in

creating a separate class party, and tying the British working class to the liberal bourgeoisie.

The massive upsurge of unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the 30 years between 1888 and 1918 created a mass trade union movement, a parliamentary Labour Party, separate from the Liberals, a trade union bureaucracy and a rank and file shop stewards movement sharply opposed to it. This period also saw the creation of a small, fragmented but precious vanguard of working class revolutionaries, Marxists who played a role totally disproportionate to their numbers in every advance made by the working class in this period.

From the time of the Chartists the British working class has exhibited a glaring disproportion between its economic strength, its militancy and trade union organisation, and its political weakness through subordination to bourgeois politics. The world domination by British capitalism, the first nation to enter the stage of imperialist parasitism, followed by a prolonged retirement as auxiliary to US imperialism, underpinned the strength of such trade unionism in bargaining over the surplus product of millions of colonial or semi-colonial slaves as well as the surplus product of their own labour. This reinforced a bureaucratic leadership which held the class fast in the gilded chains of reformism and chauvinism.

At various periods, from 1910-13, in 1919-21, again in 1925-26, between 1929 & '33, from 1945-1947 and in 1969 and 1974, spontaneous anti-capitalist struggles failed to find a clear trained cadre of revolutionary working class militants, rooted in those struggles, armed with a concrete agitational programme for workers' power. Most of the tasks faced by workers today in Britain were faced in differing ways by militants in those periods - the development of economic struggles into political struggles, the creation of a revolutionary party, its relationship to the mass reformist party - the Labour Party, the building of a mass rank and file movement, and the overcoming of isolationism, sectionalism and chauvinism, the building of a working class women's movement under revolutionary communist leadership.

A new period of capitalist crisis, of massive battles and upheavals poses to the British working class, and particularly its most far-sighted elements, all of these problems. Those who do not learn from history will be doomed to repeat the same defeats and sufferings.

The long period of capitalist stability which followed the post-war crisis and the betrayal of the working class upsurge by Stalinism and the Labour leadership has left a contradictory legacy. Twenty-five years of relative prosperity strengthened and re-juvenated the working class. Increased real wages, important measures of social welfare won in struggles, but conceded without class-wide fights, the spread of a network of shop stewards from skilled workers to almost the entire organised working class all occurred in this period. A big percentage of working class women were drawn into production, into social labour. Large numbers of black workers from former colonies joined the ranks of the British working class.

Centred in the large-scale most modern sector of production, car workers formed the most economically militant section of the working class movement. In the '50s and early 60s, the brief and highly sectional nature of this militancy limited horizons even in trade union terms. The leadership of the two major unions in the car industry,

the AUEW and the TGWU, were firmly in the hands of vicious anti-communist bureaucrats.

The gains of this period of capitalist stability included important elements of trade union control at shop-floor level over bargaining for wages and conditions. The battle over piece-rates secured important gains and established important precedents which the bosses battled to get rid of at the end of the sixties; most importantly, "mutuality" - the recognition of the right of shop stewards to be consulted and negotiated with on all important questions of speed and conditions, - was established. This led to a tremendous strengthening of the role of the shop floor organisation and of the ability of that organisation to use the perpetual bargaining over rates and job changes of the piece-work system, the perpetual comparison of rates between different sections and jobs, to push up wages and to challenge and veto management's right to manage. Yet this period of dominance by the wage push (though this was in no way responsible for inflation) had negative features.

The traditional arenas of politics - albeit reformist politics - in Labour Party Ward and Constituency - shrunk drastically. The fifties and early sixties had seen large left-reformist currents - the Bevanites, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament etc. Until the early '60s the L.P. youth movement had large numbers of working class youth in it. The mid and late sixties saw a serious decline in working class participation in these bodies. Trades councils suffered an ossification.

Unions like the Miners' and Railwaymen's allowed successive governments to impose low-wage settlements and drastic cuts in the workforce. Racism and discrimination against women and young workers met little resistance.

The economic problems of Britain's bosses in the 60s and in particular the assault on the piece-rate system - the productivity deal offensive - from '64 onwards, posed the need for rank and file workers, like the car workers, to co-ordinate their actions so as to meet the attack by a response on a plant and combine level. This forced them to turn more consciously to the task of electing "left" officials at a local and national level, officials who gave some cover and protection to rank and file organisation. Officials such as Jones and Scanlon were the outcome of these efforts, often co-ordinated by the "Communist" Party's powerful industrial network. The result was to place unions like the AUEW and the TGWU in the hands of these "lefts". Rank and File conferences, the conferences of the "Institute for Workers Control", the Liaison Committee for the Defence of the Trade Unions, represented what became known as the shop stewards' movement - rather more of an amorphous tendency than an organisation of the kind of the early shop stewards' movement in the period of the First World War.

The efforts of Labour and Tory governments from the late sixties onwards to impose incomes policies, wage freezes and legal restrictions aimed at weakening and shackling shop floor strength whilst incorporating the trade union leadership, met stiff resistance culminating in mass political strikes in 1969 and 1972 almost reaching the proportions of general strike action. This period saw a switch of focus to national battles over annual claims. Sections with right-wing leaderships who had failed miserably in the previous decade to lead any struggle were forced into action. The Post Office workers and power workers, hospital ancillary workers, building workers, dustmen, all showed exceptional

militancy. Often they were sold out and defeated. Often they were badly let down by other sections of the t.u. movement and betrayed by the TUC - as in the case of the Union of Post Office Workers.

In 1972 and 1974 the miners for the first time since the 20s took up a leading role in the working class movement, and by using tactics like the flying picket (developed by building workers) they won. They also drew to themselves the support of significant sections of the class, most graphically at Saltley, and they spearheaded the fight against the Tory wage policy, despite the weakness and collaboration of the TUC.

The other prong of the Tories' attack, the Industrial Relations' Act, aimed most directly at the shop stewards, was met largely by the AUEW and the dockers. The mass action which answered the jailings of the dockers - the Pentonville Five - forced even the TUC, who had condemned the dockers' picketing, to threaten a one-day general strike.

The unemployment levels which accompanied the 1971 recession were likewise answered by militant direct action. The occupation became, for the first time on a wide scale, a tactic of the British working class; the Manchester occupation and the Upper Clyde being the most memorable.

Women workers and black workers shook off the passivity which had long gripped them, and facing hostility often as strong from the union bureaucrats as from their bosses, they showed remarkable creativity and fighting spirit.

Why is it then, that a period which saw the massive defeat of the police at Saltley by the miners, the militant counter attack to the Pentonville jailings, a period which rediscovered the occupation and the flying picket, has given way to a period when workers have suffered a 6% drop in their real wages, 1½ million are unemployed, and social services have come under the most savage attack ever? The answer lies in two related factors: the depth and extent of the 1975 general world recession and the political weakness of the British working class movement.

THE WORKING CLASS SINCE 1975

The Trade Union bureaucrats, especially the 'lefts' had just experienced the most alarming three years of their lives; with little room for manoeuvre they had been caught between the upper and lower millstones of the Tory offensive and the working class response. They were willing, indeed eager, to co-operate with the new Labour Government and to re-establish order in the ranks of their own unions. Jones, whose dockers had crippled the Industrial Relations Act, became the central advocate of the social contract.

For twelve months the Government had to allow wages to rise, had to, albeit tardily, dismantle the worst Tory, anti-working class legislation. Inflation took off dramatically and provoked a response in terms of large claims and struggles over the threshold allowances, still in force from the Tory Phase 3.

1975 saw a turning point. Initially the Labour Government was a weak but necessary Government for the ruling class - an agency for them to make unavoidable concessions, in such a way as to defuse and demobilise militancy rather than encourage it. The Government had a 'left' face through Foot and Benn and the external support of Jones. How was it possible for this government to become relatively strong

and effective in the 1975 trough of the recession, getting away with far higher unemployment levels than the Tories had, cutting social spending more drastically, reducing net wages by 6% and imposing "the most successful incomes policy ever"?

Firstly, a Labour government has prestige in the working class movement as a government of 'our' party. Great masses of workers see a Tory government's actions as those of an alien and enemy class - they saw the crisis of '71/'72 as a Tory crisis. The Tories' use of the "national interest" ideology is always much less effective than that of an ostensibly working class party in alliance with the trade unions.

Secondly, nearly all significant sections of the trade union bureaucracy were determined to co-operate with the Government's social contract to defuse the radicalised rank and file and isolate the militants - as Jones was able to do in the docks.

Thirdly, the trough of the crisis in 1975 exerted a strong dampening effect on militancy. The collapse or near collapse of whole sections of the car industry - Chryslers and Leyland, the capture of 40% of the home market by foreign car imports - the need for massive state rescue schemes posed questions which demanded class wide and government level solutions. It posed them moreover to one of the most fragmented and sectionalised groups of militant workers. Struggles against massive lay-offs, closures and short time working nowhere reached the levels of the early '70s. The occupation tactic was left almost unused. With large industries and combines making a loss nationalisation or massive subsidies was the only solution. The argument shifted to how to achieve this - by bargaining and conciliation, by offering collaboration and participation with management, selling conditions gained over years of struggle; or by militant tactics forcing nationalisation. The latter course because of its scale necessarily involved the question of no compensation to the bankrupt capitalists (as against the Labour Government's policy of compensation without nationalisation.). It necessarily involved the defence and extension of shop floor control, workers' control of hiring and firing, track speed etc. as against the treacherous participation schemes designed to take shop floor organisation away from the workers and use it as a policeman.

The amorphous 'rank and file' leadership at a factory level, the shop stewards, faced and face a severe and deep-rooted crisis. In the last analysis it is a political crisis.

ECONOMISM - NO ANSWER

The '50s and '60s did not uproot reformism from the British working class. A reformist political party seemed a less necessary focus for activity to militants than the trades unions, which could win 'reforms' in wages and could bargain politically with the government of the day, be it Labour or Tory. The rank and file militants remained dominated by a very passive adherence to the Labour Party and a very active militant trade unionism. This attitude, generalised and systematised most coherently by Tony Cliff and the SWP group, leads to economism, the belief that political struggle develops naturally and spontaneously out of economic struggle. The successes of the shop stewards were paralleled on a small scale, by the SWP, under a Tory government and with a limited recession.

The economic militant now faces a series of challenges to which answers have to be found:-

1. How to link the tremendous potential of rank and file direct action, at the moment tied to limited and immediate demands, to real society-wide solutions to the drastic problems of capitalism.

2. The growing importance of the ideological struggle - the barrage of bosses' propaganda penetrating every crevice, every weakness in the working class's consciousness, chauvinism, racism, sexism, 'moderation' and class collaboration.
3. How to combat the shift to the right, the defection and betrayal of 'left' officials whom the militants fought to instal.
4. How to fight the onslaughts of a Labour government managing capitalism, determined the working class shall pay and thus determined to isolate and root out the militant - having much more effective agents and bloodhounds at all levels of the TU machine than the Tories could dispose of.

The Communist Party, though it can offer an uncomparable network of militants, can offer not one solution to these problems - only a tying of militants to the left reformist TU leaders who in turn are tied to the right-wing which in turn is tied to capitalism.

The economism of spontaneous 'rank and filism' of the SWP group sums up the problem but offers no solution. The problems the shop-floor militants face cannot be met by plugging away at militant claims, on a sectional basis, or switching attention exclusively to issues like unemployment and closures - important as all these are. The central issues that must be squarely tackled are - inflation and what demands can unify and meet the challenge of high and fluctuating rates, the question of fighting for nationalisation under workers' control, the fight against social expenditure cuts, wage controls and the fight against incomes policy. Centrally involved in all of these is the crippling legacy of reformism and chauvinism - the question of the Labour government.

LABOUR GOVERNMENT - THE RECORD - THE LEFT AND THE ELECTIONS

The question of the Labour Government is posed most sharply by answering the question: what should be the position of revolutionary communists in the forthcoming General Election in Britain?

The Labour government since 1974 to '75, under a smokescreen of left rhetoric, with promises to bring about "a fundamental shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families" it demobilised the movement which had freed the Pentonville Five and won the miners' claim. In its first year in office Labour handed out a number of half-hearted reforms, the repeal of the hated Industrial Relations Act, vociferously proclaiming an end to incomes policy and preparing the enormous diversion of the "Great Debate" on EEC withdrawal. The strike movement of '71 to '74, though reaching levels of militancy unseen since 1926, remained under the leadership of CP and LP left wingers at rank and file level, and nationally under the lead of the TU "lefts". This leadership was unable to see beyond limited reforms to the real crisis of British capitalism and the inevitable return to sharper attack on the bosses' part. Worse, they had led working class activists into the chauvinist campaign around EEC withdrawal, inculcating a sense of defeat in the more class conscious elements and violating the basic principle of working class independence by involving them on one side of a battle between sectors of the ruling class.

After 1975 the militants had neither leadership nor perspective to resist the government's sharp turn. The fair weather reform

programmes of the labour movement leadership were dropped by the government like hot potatoes. The TUC, with taunts from the Labour government to either put up or shut up, dropped its own proposals one by one. Deserted by the Joneses and Scanlons, the Heffers and Mikardos fell silent. The Lefts could suggest no programme to deal with the capitalist crisis because it would have to be based on (1) solving the crisis at the expense of the bosses and (2) mobilising the direct action of the millions of trade unionists against the inevitable direct action of the bosses, their army and bureaucracy.

Neither the Trade Union Bureaucracy nor the Parliamentary cretins dared envisage such a prospect. However, the needs of a period of crisis did not allow these gentlemen to stay silent for long. They were forced to speak out and act on the government's side. Foot stomped union conference platforms pleading for wage restraint. Benn engineered the defeat of the Miners and Bidwell acted as architect of the racist Select Committee report on Immigration.

In 1976-77 spontaneous movements against the cuts in real wages erupted, but the almost total opposition of the bureaucracy at all levels isolated and fragmented these struggles. In the wake of the defeats of Grunwick, the Miners, the Firemen, and in Leyland, a definite if temporary atmosphere of retreat was born, witnessed by the low strike figures for the first three months of '78 and the debacle of the Broad Left on the AUEW elections, culminating in Duffy's defeat of Wright for AUEW President.

The CP, dependent on the Labour and TU Lefts for its strategy of a peaceful parliamentary road to socialism, has to fall in, one step to the left of the Government-TUC Lefts bloc. Its leading industrial figures like Derek Robinson, proved themselves adept agents of class collaboration and betrayal as the Speke closure shows. It cannot mobilise the rank and file (as it helped to do in '71) via the LCDTU in a situation which would bring the whole wrath of the bureaucrats on its head.

THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

The SWP (fraternal group of the Irish SWT) is incapable of grasping the depth of the crisis of British capitalism and the tasks it poses for the working class. High profit for them means that there is money in the kitty to be won by militant trade unionism. Outside of this they fall into moral protest at the evil nature of capitalism, incapable of going beyond the average militant's loathing of the petty privileges and repeated betrayals of the union bureaucrats. Their economism and centrism is strong on left rhetoric, on occasional courageous acts of militancy, but faced with a serious crisis and class-wide lack of leadership they can offer no programme for tackling the political issues which are posed by the economic offensive, issues which if not frankly addressed by a fighting strategy will leave even the most militant shop steward unarmed and confused.

Faced with the continued adhesion of the class to labourism they search desperately for one stunt after another to make themselves a credible alternative to Labour. The SWP's only answer to the millions of workers who still support Labour in one way or another is the non-answer - 'join the SWP'.

INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP

The revolutionary communist response to the problem of reformism, the united front method, would if implemented in the present period be limited to a few immediate mobilising issues, with the presentation of a focussed transitional programme as a strategic alternative to reformism. The IMG's position on elections, however, hovers uneasily between the consistent reformism of the CP (- a left government with communist MPs to start the slow business of legislating towards socialism) and the revolutionary position of using the election forum to present the essentials of a revolutionary programme of action addressed to the burning issues facing the working class. What they present is a compendium of demands acceptable to workers, blacks, women, squatters, ecologists, left bureaucrats, Scottish and Welsh nationalists etc., in order to bring into being a "class struggle left wing" (- much as their fraternal group(s) MSR/PD in Ireland fights for a programme acceptable to anti-unionist workers, republicans, SDLP, Irish Independence Party, dissident Fianna Failers etc.).

It is in this context that their "Socialist Unity" initiative is viewed as a central move in founding a "united revolutionary organisation". The upshot is that its platform is too diffuse for a united front mobilisation and is aimed not to promote common action with reformists but common propaganda. Trotsky's formula for united front tactics was "March separately - Strike together". The IMG have turned this on its head - "marching" mixed up in a common propaganda bloc, and "striking" on their own.

Their method does not present a revolutionary programme focussed on the tasks of the crisis, not to speak of laying out the basis of a united revolutionary organisation! Thus while Socialist Unity calls itself a coalition of "far left" or marxist organisations, its mass electoral propaganda limits itself to immediate issues. For example, take Hilda Kean's platform as Socialist Unity candidate for the local elections in Spital Fields last October. It opposes Healey's 10% limit, calls for inflation-proofing of wages; for more homes, schools and hospitals; nationalisation of firms declaring redundancies; reduction of the working week; no platform for the National Front; support for black self-defence; British Troops out of Ireland; and end to racist regimes in Rhodesia and S.Africa and to all Britain's military alliances. This is called a socialist programme to be gained by mass action.

An Islington Socialist Unity leaflet of May 4th last for the local government elections again limits itself to calling for the nationalisation of firms that declare redundancies. In the Waltham Forest election Socialist Unity comes out as not having any great faith in parliament and proposes "changing the system" because the problem is that "wealth is in the wrong hands".

These platforms are not the mobilising demands of a revolutionary programme, and indeed they are reforms presented in a reformist manner. Nowhere are the direct action tactics necessary to fight for them - the solidarity strike, mass picket, workers' defence squads, factory occupations - even mentioned. The positions are instead not even radical reformist in that the scope of expropriation is expressly limited to failed capitalist enterprises and the banks - both of which would leave capitalism intact. What is more, these measures are posed

under the rubric - "the resources are there to meet our needs"! Disguised 'transitional demands', such as inflation proofing of wages and benefits and pensions, are robbed of the vital element of working class direct action and of workers' rank and file inspection and control. Nowhere is the question of the capitalist state's resistance to the fight for the demands mentioned, nor the need to fight for a workers' government to stand over every gain of the masses in struggle and as the context of a fight for a workers' militia and workers' councils.

Their answer to the question of government, and their basic position on the General election, is to advocate as the alternative the re-election of the Labour Government and a class struggle alliance of its left wing and themselves on the above hodge-podge platforms. It doesn't fight to place demands on this government to break with the bosses. Rather, it simplistically states that the struggle must go on - with Labour back in power - presumably in the hope that some inevitable revolutionary process will do the job for them.

Thus the IMG stands on the terrain of the left centrists who opposed Trotsky, notwithstanding their claim to be line of descent from Trotsky's Fourth International. We may expect a similar "class-struggle left-wing" project in the local elections and beyond from the sister group in Ireland, bringing together a passive propaganda bloc of the widest collection of "forces" - left bureaucrats, republicans, feminists, anti-nuclear ecologists and elements of the "far left".

SOCIALIST CAMPAIGN FOR A LABOUR VICTORY

The basic aim of the SCLV, an alliance largely due to the ICL and its supporters in the Labour Party around the paper Workers' Action, was laid down at a Conference last July: "...to ensure a massive class vote for the Labour Party and the defeat of the Tories - but to do so without supporting or lending credence to the dominant right wing policies of the Labour and TUC leadership" (Workers Action 112). This aim is vague and evasive. It is not clear whether the SCLV is a campaign to organise the working class for a fight back against the present government and the next (whether Labour or Tory) or simply a development of the left wing of the LP election machine. Because the conference evaded this key question of programme it has developed into little more than a bloc committed to distributing compromised common propaganda.

Workers Power, fraternal organisation of the IWG, and part of the international communist tendency we are jointly striving to build, attended the July conference with a series of amendments to the SCLV programme. The ICL collaborated in the suppression of discussion of these amendments - showing a further degeneration of this hopeful Trotskyist grouping along the road to centrism. The amendments from WP aimed to achieve two things:

- 1) to outline concrete methods of struggle for workers on the key issues facing them - direct action to prevent all plant closures, occupations to force nationalisation of them, direct action to stop implementation of cuts, Labour councillors to be forced by rank and file to refuse to implement the cuts or to pay the crippling debts to banks etc.
- 2) to write in the basic principle that the direct action struggles of workers is primary and that the key issue is to build and promote it on a correct basis whether or not it threatens the Labour Government - "no holding back on workers struggles to preserve the Labour Government."

Workers Power are for a Labour vote as an elementary class vote against the Tories and the other bourgeois parties but totally against sacrificing any group of workers or any interest of the class as a whole to a Labour victory. WP thus holds a position of critical support for the SCLV:

"As long as the masses wish to keep 'their' parties in Government rather than allow the open bourgeois parties to rule we support this elementary act of class consciousness. Following the method of the United Front even in the field of the ballot box we strike together - that is we vote with them for the reformist workers' party. But we march separately under our own banner (i.e. our programme) which we raise against the reformist leaders as a series of demands on them"

(WP theses on Elections, WP Journal No. 6, p.7)

To prevent the SCLV acting as a cover for left fakers and to poise it to really solidarise actively with all workers on the receiving end of Callaghan's attacks, WP have proposed the following united front basic platform.

- *Smash Phase Four. Organised solidarity action with all workers fighting to break pay norms. No incomes policy under capitalism. For substantial catch-up claims and a sliding scale of wages to protect against inflation on the basis of a working class cost-of-living index. No holding back to preserve the Labour Government.
- *All-out opposition to Labour's bloody policy in Ireland. No deals with the Ulster Unionists for their support in Parliament. Immediate withdrawal of troops.
- *For a 35-hour week with no loss of pay.
- *Active labour movement support for black self-defence. Repeal of all immigration acts.
- *Fight to force the Labour Government to legislate free contraception and abortion on demand.
- *For Labour MPs, prospective candidates and local councillors to be forced to put themselves at the head of all struggles and vote against all anti-working class measures - even if this means the downfall of the Labour Government.

Exemplified here is the method of critical support for Labour, posing key parts of a communist programme which a united front of reformist workers and revolutionaries should place as demands on Labour. Using this method, revolutionaries say to workers who still have illusions in the LP "These are important issues which we all need and desire keenly enough to engage in united action for. You believe the LP is a workers party and can be made to fight for these. We don't agree on this, holding the LP to be a bosses party in the working class. If you are right the LP can be forced to lead a victorious fight for these things. We are willing to join with you to put the issue to the test. Let's build a movement, a united front in action, of the working class to win them in struggle. This movement can be the basis of going forward to win our demands in any case if the LP lets us down. And out of this movement we will be able to lay the foundation for a real Workers Government that can act for the workers with ever greater energy than Callaghan and Co. now acts against them".

Only such a method adequately addresses the powerful hold of reformism. Only such a method - because it starts out from keenly felt needs of millions and leads the workers on from there right up to the task of smashing the state power of the bosses by the dictatorship of the proletariat - only this is in the tradition of Leninism, the first four Congresses of the Communist International and the work of Leon Trotsky in the '20s and '30s towards building a new revolutionary international.

BUILD THE RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT AGAINST THE CAPITALIST OFFENSIVE

This article outlines the revolutionary socialist perspective on the trade unions and Trade Union Bureaucracy and explains the need and purpose of a rank and file movement in the struggle for workers' power. The building of such a revolutionary movement proceeds from immediate and partial - and often extremely sectional - struggles which lack any political perspective. But an explicit worked-out political perspective is essential to guide the interventions of socialists and to equip them in the ideological struggle. That does not mean making acceptance of a full programme for the rank and file into a precondition of socialists' intervention among organised workers - that would be a caricature. The tactical questions posed by implementing the strategy - for a rank and file movement deserve careful treatment in respect of concrete tasks and situations, but to reduce the whole question to so-called 'tactics', without any perspective of fighting for workers' power, can only lead to economism, trailing the existing struggles and moralistic attacks on the Bureaucracy.

A recent article in Socialist Worker Review, purporting to be a 'basic position' arising from years of experience in the SWM, exemplifies this danger. The article's only mention of politics or socialism is in a parting plea for socialists to 'relate more of their political energies to the industrial and trade union struggle', because, it is stated, 'It's they who most clearly see through the arguments of both the ruling class and the trade union bureaucracy'. But what are these arguments - we are given no clue -? And more importantly what arguments do socialists have to offer?

THE TWO FACES OF TRADE UNIONISM

Trade unions under capitalism have a dual aspect:

- i) They serve to domesticate the working class within capitalism. Bargaining over the wage contract, arbitrated by a distinct bureaucratic caste in the workers' movement, trade unions pose no fundamental challenge to capitalist relations. This domesticating aspect of the trade unions is organisational and ideologically underpinned by the Trade Union Bureaucracy. They are committed to negotiating and maintaining the wage contract. Since the last half of the 19th century this caste has grown ever larger and has been drawn more and more into the actual administrative machinery of the bosses' state.
- ii) But the trade unions remain the basic means by which workers defend and improve their living standards within capitalism. As the bedrock fighting organisations of the working class they retain a potential, against the domesticating bureaucratic apparatus, for the organisation of the mass of the working class in struggle against the bosses:-

"The trade unions of our time can either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolution, or, on the contrary, the trade unions can become the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat" (Trotsky, 'Trade Unions

in the epoch of Imperialist Decay)

The dual aspect of trade unionism means inevitably that a communist strategy in the trade unions must be directed to transforming the unions into organs of working class struggle for power, against the conservative bureaucratic apparatus that fetters and strangles them. The rank and file movement we must seek to build is fundamental to that perspective. Its politics, its strategy and tactics must serve aim of putting the whole working class on a war footing as part of the struggle for workers' power.

Just as the class struggle is inevitable under capitalism (the struggle to defend and improve living standards and living conditions), so it follows that in periods of capitalist decay and instability the the bureaucratic trade union apparatus will be incapable of defending the elementary needs of the working class.

It is the inevitable contradiction between the trade union bureaucracy and the fighting needs of the class that gives rise to the unofficial organisations of the class. This is borne out in the growth of the unofficial movement of general workers under Larkin and Connolly, reflecting a similar unofficial syndicalist upsurge of the rank and file in Britain, Europe and the USA, in the major unofficial strikes during the war of independence, and in such contemporary unofficial rank and file organisations as the powerful ESB Day Workers Association of 1968, and the more recent Power Stations Committee, the Fuel Lorry Drivers' Committee, the Dublin Shop Stewards Committee, the Belfast United Workers Group and the West Belfast Workers Action Council. In these we have proof that:

- i) Trade Unions are not solely the property of the bureaucratic apparatus.
- ii) The working class must inevitably look to unofficial workplace based organisations in all periods when workers' living standards, working conditions and organisations come under attack.

Unofficial workplace organisation is inevitable but of itself it is incapable of spontaneously generating a political alternative to the trade union bureaucracy. The reform and amalgamation movements of the early 20th century in Britain and Ireland and of the 1930s in the USA, the resilience of the British Shop Stewards movement in unofficial action in the late '60s and the more scattered but powerful unofficial upsurges here, testify both to the mobilising potential of the unofficial movement compared to the Trade Union Bureaucracy and to the inherent political weakness and instability of that movement without communist leadership. The crisis of leadership in the shop steward stratum of British and Irish workers in the early '70s underlines the bankruptcy of seeing a shop steward based movement, of itself and by itself, posing a direct and consistent challenge to the projects of the bureaucracy.

Not only can such a challenge not be expected to simply grow 'from below' out of the shop stewards milieu, but the employers themselves have systematically set out to draw in and incorporate significant sections of the once 'unofficial' levels of the trade union movement - hence O'Leary's "Workers Participation (State Enterprises) Act, 1977", the Ryder schemes in Leyland and the "pioneering", 'Co-Determination' schemes of the West German bourgeoisie.

The task of communists is to struggle for the political leadership in the unofficial movement, a leadership committed to the wholesale transformation of both the purpose and the structure of the mass trade unions - to convert them into Red Trade Unions. Such a transformation must be based on the class energy and mobilising potential of the unofficial movement. And that is the purpose of the rank and file movement.

THE LESSONS OF THE BRITISH MINORITY MOVEMENT

Communists must learn the key significance of the Minority Movement of the early 1920s in Britain. This movement was not simply an extension of pre-existing unofficial movements such as the shop stewards movement. It transcended them fundamentally and its political significance is precisely in this fact. Under the hammer-blows of the Russian Revolution, as a direct result of the conscious intervention of a communist party guided by the arsenal of revolutionary strategy and tactics established by the Communist(Third)International, an unofficial movement was deliberately and systematically built, committed, initially, to the transformation of the unions as a means of organising the working class in the struggle for state power.

The militant unofficial minorities in the major unions were welded into a potential alternative revolutionary leadership under the programme of the international communist party. In this way the Minority Movement was distinct from the previous syndicalist shop stewards movement, to which the mobilisation round Connolly and Larkin was akin. It is this vital distinction that lies at the heart of our orientation in the IWG to the building of a rank and file movement in the period ahead.

In every major union there exists a distinct militant minority. The capitalist offensive and the class collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy poses sharp political questions before this minority of militants.

Only a revolutionary class programme can politically answer those questions, unite these militants and equip them to win the support of the shop floor against the employers and the trade union bureaucrats. Such is the task and the specific problem to which communists in the unions must address themselves today.

THE LEFT AND THE ISSUE OF BUILDING A RANK AND FILE MOVEMENTSocialist Workers Tendency

The SWM has always claimed credit for stressing the key importance of rank and file activity and even at times advocated the building of a rank and file movement. However, in its perspective the rank and file movement was assigned a limited trade union role, as a half-way house between the party and the class. In the division of labour implicit here, the Party consisted of those ready to overthrow capitalism; while the rank and file movement organised those ready to fight.

This schema envisaged the rank and file movement as no more than a militant shop steward based movement. The development of such a movement was possible because of the sellouts of the official movement. The job of revolutionaries was to assist in organising this current. Revolutionaries would be differentiated by the systematic and sharp nature of the services - in organisational terms and in terms of supplying militant slogans. While the SWM emphasised the need for independence from and opposition to the trade union bureaucracy this opposition was seen in purely organisational terms:

"We have always to counter the authority and influence which the Trade Union leaders have - even when they are doing nothing in particular. Militants are often isolated and their voice is stifled. That is precisely why we need to develop ways and means of bringing them together within the trade union Movement."

('Now Fight Back', SWM Pamphlet of 1976. P.18.)

We could summarise the SWM's position on the aim and structure therefore as follows:

- i. Organisation at workplace level was the key question and issue.
- ii. The aim of the rank and file movement was to connect existing militant sectors with each other on the basis of lowest common denominator militancy.

- iii. The rank and file movement must work within unions to challenge the reformist leaders chiefly over their organisational control of the unions.
- iv. The rank and file movement must have a national organisational structure - and building this is the specific role of conscious, committed militants - namely the Party.

Neither the SWM nor its mentor organisation, the Socialist Workers Party, have learnt any of the lessons of the first four congresses of the Third International or the Red International of Labour Unions, which were applied in the Minority movement, for example.

They have never understood, and have nothing but contempt for the study of the tradition of Bolshevism in the trade unions which alone would enable them to understand, that a really coherent rank and file movement could only be organised round a political challenge to all forms of class collaboration and the class collaborating bureaucracy - a programme for the transformation of the Unions on a revolutionary war footing against the capitalist offensive.

All the attempts by the SWM and the SWP to build a rank and file movement have failed. This is not primarily because they failed to recognise the organisational independence of a rank and file movement but, as we have outlined in CLASS STRUGGLE, No 1 - 'Communists in the Trade Unions', because of their wrong political basis.

Conceiving the rank and file movement as a half way house between the party and the class the SWM and SWP were prepared to fight for militant policies not being carried out by the trade union bureaucracy. Such policies of militant, shop floor 'economic reformism' could lay the basis for individual stunts such as the SWP's 'Right to Work' march or the SWM's cul de sac initiative round New Liberty. They could not be the basis for a political challenge of the trade union bureaucracy. This must necessarily be a challenge to transform the unions so as to enable them to fight on programme aimed at workers' power - because only this challenges the core of the bureaucracy's political role, i.e., their defence of the system on which their function as brokers between labour and capital depends.

As the working class faces the new offensive of capitalism and imperialism which defines the new period we are entering, and as it feels the need more and more for class-wide political answers to its problems, the "mere militancy" perspective of this degenerated Trotskyist tradition will stand out ever more clearly as a cul de sac for the class.

THE MOVEMENT FOR A SOCIALIST REPUBLIC.

In comparison with the Socialist Workers Tendency the MSR (now fused with Peoples Democracy) may seem to many militants to have a more political understanding of the problem of the trade union bureaucracy - an alternative to the crude rhetoric about the lunches and wine swilling of the trade union leaders. In reality however the MSR's drive to build 'Unionwide' networks of militants is based on a refusal to follow in the footsteps of revolutionary communists in the Trade Unions. Such 'class struggle tendencies' as they envisage, can be no more than reformist ginger-groups unless they fight to organise the rank and file in struggle, that is both organisationally and politically independent of the bureaucracy and unless, as part of this, they repeatedly explain to the mass of workers that the 'left' leaders, no less than the right, will inevitably sell out and disarm the movement unless they put themselves under the direct discipline and control of the organised rank and file.

The MSR are committed to building 'militant' caucuses in the unions in political alliance with sections of the left officials. They quite falsely counterpose the division between 'rights' and 'lefts' at all

levels of the trade union movement. As a consequence they counterpose a programme to unite all 'class struggle lefts' to the revolutionary communist programme which sees a distinct division of interest between the labour bureaucracy and the trade union rank and file and which is a programme of action to unite the rank and file in struggle for state power. This, as we explained in CLASS STRUGGLE, No 1., PP 20-21, is the explanation of their advocacy of an economic plan: "in order to get the economy going" (MSR leaflet, May 1976) and of their repeated refusal to advocate a return to free collective bargaining, of their opposition to the revival of the Dublin Shop Stewards Committee round the 1976 wage agreement fight and of the opposition of their women members in the former Irishwomen United to the proposal for womens' caucuses in the unions.

Whereas the SWT talk of a movement of all who want to fight, the MSR talk of building broad and non-exclusive alliances of all class struggle elements. Neither stand in the tradition of Bolshevism or the revolutionary Minority Movement. The SWT, while advocating independence of the trade union officials, have in fact no real alternative political programme to this officialdom. The MSR explicitly talk of building broad democratic alliances that embrace sections of that officialdom. For these 'Trotskyists' Trotsky's maxim about the trade union bureaucracy being lieutenants of the capitalists inside the body of the working class is an embarrassing memory..

THE LEAGUE FOR A WORKERS REPUBLIC

The LWR have moved 180 degrees from their position in the Socialist Labour Alliance and Dublin Shop Stewards Committee days. They then thought a current round these forces could grow over into a centrist development large enough to by-pass the struggle with the Labour Party. With the entry of the Labour Party into coalition this perspective changed and the LWR implemented its so-called tactical turn to the mass organisations of the working class - the Labour Party and Trade Unions. Their perspective here, however, is not the building of an unofficial rank and file movement round the fight in the grass roots of the trade unions and Labour Party for a revolutionary communist programme of action. The perspective, if it may be so dignified, is one of hoping and waiting for "a left wing to crystallise which has importance as a forum for political discussion and which will attract, in the first instance, many militants who will be the basis of a revolutionary party in a break with the apparatus and outlook of reformism". (Conference Documents, 1977. P27). The perspective is to wait for this, aiding it gently with one copy of the 1938 Programme inside one's topcoat. This means, of course not doing anything that would: "isolate one from the mass organisations". And this, in practice, is the basis of the LWR's spurning of unofficial movements - shown most recently in its disgraceful proposal that TUCAR, in Belfast and Derry, should not attempt to carry its banner in the May Day marches unless officially permitted and sponsored. No lead in the building of a rank and file movement can be expected from this quarter.

THE IRISH WORKERS GROUP

The IWG sees the fight for a communist led rank and file movement committed to the transformation of the tasks and structures of the Trade Union organisations as a central task in the struggle to organise the working class for power. Such a rank and file movement must have a clear communist programme. It must not be a half way house of limited and militant demands as in the SWT's economistic scenario. It is our task to fight for this conception of the rank and file movement in the SLP, and through it in the unofficial struggles of the class. We will also fight for it in the 'rank and file' appendages of the centrist groups, eg., SWT's New Liberty Group. Communists place no conditions on their involvement in the mass struggles of the working class, but their inter-

vention is based on the fight for the programme that can take the working class beyond unofficial militancy, and that can organise the class for power.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF TRADE UNION OFFICIALS IN THE RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT

From the days of the peak activity of the Dublin Shop Stewards Committee in Spring 1974, when officials like Matt Merrigan were on its platform, the issue of the role of trade union officials has been on the agenda but as yet has found no answer.

We do not organisationally debar trade union officials from involvement in the rank and file movement. For us the key test of those trade union officials, who inevitably will claim allegiance to a rank and file movement with any pulling power, is as follows:

(a) We will in no way tailor our political programme and strategy of rank and file independence to win these 'left' officials such as in ATGWU or TASS. On the contrary, Communists in the unions must never, whilst fighting to build a real rank and file movement, cease to warn the leading sections of the class of the treachery and bankruptcy of the 'Left-talking' Trade Union officials.

(b) Those officials who offer support must immediately be put to the test before leading sections of militant workers. The rank and file movement must demand of all Trade Union officials adhering to it that that they lead a struggle for the programme of the movement - and - that they openly place themselves and their union machinery under the democratic surveillance of the rank and file. We argue that the unions must be transformed. If they are to meet the needs of the class they must be able to break the power of the capitalists and their lieutenants in the unions, the Trade Union bureaucracy.

We do not view the question of democratising the unions as something separate from the fight to transcend narrow trade union politics, how-militant they may be. We are not seeking merely to democratise trade unionism - as is the SWT. This is the significance of demarcation between the IWG's definition of the foundation of a rank and file movement as a worked out platform of opposition to the offensive of capitalism and imperialism and the SWT's bland aim of democratising the Trade Union movement without any real answer to the question: 'What for?'

The purpose of democracy is to sharpen and focus the political programme, the strategy and tactics of the new leadership which is fighting to become an alternative to the official leaders. The SWT have, again, put the cart before the horse.

To transcend narrow trade union politics we call, in each union and nationally, for a shop stewards based rank and file movement. In this we are not simply repeating the call of the pre-Minority Movement syndicalists in Britain. We argue that the political content of such a movement must be a communist programme of action. We never cease in our agitation and propaganda to point this out. The experience of the unofficial movement round Larkin and Connolly and the industrial action during the war of independence, the experience of the rank and file shop stewards movement in Britain after the first Imperialist world war and the experience of the working class world wide - the most recent examples being Chile and Portugal, all show that a rank and file organisation with no clear revolutionary alternative to that of the trade union apparatus will be outmanoeuvred and defeated by the Trade Union Bureaucracy - however militant and fiery it may be.

Of course such a movement must be committed to democratising the unions, opposing all cuts and incomes policies, opposing all repression, against class collaboration in all its forms, against all divisions in the ranks of labour on the basis of race, sex, creed or trade. Such a movement must be always prepared to fight independently of the Trade Union Bureaucracy. But of itself this is no more than a programme of militant trade unionism, a programme that does not address the political

needs and revolutionary tasks facing the proletariat.

We must therefore, while supporting every real break with class collaboration and the class collaborators, fight openly for our communist programme as the only alternative to degeneration and collapse. We must raise loud and clear our warning that without such a programme there can be no sustained challenge to the employers or their agents in the workers organisations. Every unofficial movement must face this fact or face isolation and defeat. All attempts by centrists to proclaim 'movements' or 'tendencies' on the basis of a recipe of limited demands are similarly fated. The most recent examples are the West Belfast Workers Action Council, the Dublin Fight Unemployment Committee, and New Liberty. It is our responsibility, as the only coherent Bolshevik nucleus at present in the labour movement, to argue and explain this in every situation open to us and thereby gather round us the forces steered in the grasp of these ideas to initiate a real rank and file movement.

For the IWG the question of building a rank and file movement under revolutionary communist leadership is not simply a subject for passive propaganda. The developing offensive of capitalism and imperialism - and this for us means chiefly British Imperialism - and the bankruptcy of the traditional methods of Republicanism, Stalinism, Centrism and the Trade Union officials in the face of these attacks, makes the building of a rank and file movement a burning and immediate need for the working class. We commit ourselves to fight openly for our programme, for our communist conception of the tasks of the rank and file movement in all areas of class struggle open to us and also in the phoney and diversionary 'rank and file' creations of the centrist groups.

DRAFT ACTION PROGRAMME FOR A NATIONAL RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT

I) A NEW PERIOD OF CRISIS

A new period of crisis has opened up for world capitalism. The period of expansion and relative stability which characterised the 50's and 60's has ended. It has given way to a new period of chronic instability affecting all the major capitalist countries. This period, marked by high rates of inflation, declining rates of profit, sharpening competition between the major capitalist economies for investment and markets, and the collapse of major companies employing thousands of workers, propels the capitalist class everywhere to devise new methods to increase the exploitation of the working class. The capitalist class internationally is seeking to solve its crisis by attacking workers' rights and organisations, by driving down living standards, by increasing the army of the unemployed, by fostering and exploiting every division in the working class.

In the USA, in Italy, France and Britain the working class is faced with struggling to avoid a capitalist solution which will mean the loss of most of its post-war gains in terms of wages and social services and the weakening and possible destruction of its class organisations. Conflicts between movements of national liberation and the local agents of imperialism, eg., Southern Africa, have the potential for setting off a Third imperialist world war - one whose barbarism would dwarf those of the first half of this century. The working class is faced with the task of wresting from the hands of the bourgeoisie political and economic power if it is to avoid this fate and weld the enormous productive resources of the advanced sectors of the industrialised world to the crying famine of scores of millions and the hunger of billions.

II) THE IRISH WORKING CLASS AND THE CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

The Irish working class at present is demoralised and deeply divided. Its living standards have been driven down. Unemployment has ravaged the lives of thousands North and South and Womens enslavement is deeper than perhaps anywhere in Europe. Repression by courts, police, and army against strikers and anti-imperialist activists has intensified year after year. And all this occurs within a deepening world wide crisis

of the the capitalist system in which British imperialism is a weak link.

The general election showed that workers clearly understood the futility of supporting the Labour Party as the defender of their interests, but they had no alternative capable of meeting their class needs.

At the moment, sections of our class, North and South, through the outbreak of unofficial strikes, show that they are able and willing to fight not only their exploiters but also those bureaucrats in the trade union and labour movement who have attempted time and again to strangle the real fighting power of the class in the interest of defending the basis of their role as brokers between labour and capital. division

Sectional struggles* in themselves overcome the historical/ of the Irish working class, whatever the display of militancy and courage.

What is required to defend the immediate needs of the class on a war footing are class wide demands and political solutions based on the direct action of workers and designed to pose the question of the seizure of state power by workers as an unpostponable necessity.

* cannot

To be continued.

The next part of this article will outline the elements of a programme for building the rank and file movement.

IWG TUCAR LEAFLET

(The following is the text of the IWG position put to the recent aggregate conference of the Trade Union Campaign Against Repression.)

After nearly two years in existence TUCAR, formed to mobilise and build a trade union based movement against repression, has failed to draw into its ranks any significant group of rank and file trade unionists. Its trade union membership is almost exclusively drawn from the various political groups involved in setting up TUCAR. We believe there are two main reasons for the failures so far.

1. The historic and traditional weaknesses and divisions within the Irish working class and trade union movement - economism, syndicalism, craft sectionalism etc. - make the task of building an explicit rank and file political movement extremely difficult, whatever the situation. In conditions of political setbacks in every area of the class struggle, whether in the direct war against imperialism in the North, or against the employers generally, demoralisation and apathy have strengthened many of the divisions and sectional weaknesses further. In doing so the grip of the trade union bureaucracy has been strengthened. No one underestimates the difficulties facing us. Therefore any attempt to build a working class fight against repression has to be based on an organisation and a programme of demands which spell out sharply and clearly that the working class is the only class which has both the power and the interest to end repression; and further, that the mobilisation of the rank and file in direct action for the demands of that programme can be the only basis of fighting for that interest. Any movement which fudges these elementary principles of revolutionary socialism will inevitably serve other, non-working class interests. We believe that this is precisely the case in TUCAR.
2. From the very beginning TUCAR has fudged the question of rank and file direct action as a basis for a correct strategy which alone represents the independent interests of the working class in Ireland as a whole. In accepting a demand for a public inquiry in the South, TUCAR has remained politically indistinguishable from every other non- and anti- working class voice calling for this demand as well - and this at a time when both the Coalition and later Fianna Fail were under growing pressure on the issue of repression. To support such a demand has led to the belief that workers cannot at this point in time "be mobilised directly, and that therefore first we must get sections of the trade union bureaucracy and Labour Party stalwarts to commit themselves to making verbal calls for a public inquiry against repression. The IWG have never been opposed to putting demands on TU leaders and to the labour movement leadership in general; but to substitute their verbal commitments, as the basis for a campaign, for the admittedly long and difficult task of seeking to mobilise and win the support of the rank and file to TUCAR, is disastrous. On such a 'strategy', the rank and file will never be ready.

In the North, where TUCAR stands for a trade union inquiry, we have seen the search for 'substitutes' reach its most extreme level of absurdity. At the Coalisland conference in January, only one resolution (from the Derry branch of the SLP, promoted by IWG)

called unequivocally for the building of TUCAR as the basis of mobilising a working class movement against repression. The resolution was never debated and was put at the end of the agenda. All the other political groups in TUCAR claiming to be revolutionary marxists supported a resolution which called for the building of the Relatives Action Committees in the 6 and 26 Counties as the basis for a mass campaign. Let them explain why they did so. The outcome of that conference was called the "National Resistance Campaign", supported again by all of these 'revolutionary marxist' groups; - it sank beneath the waves without trace. Yet these same groups have continued to attempt to ride the two horses of TUCAR and the RACs. In effect, this has meant a relegation of TUCAR to either a 'limited initiative' (the SWT resolution passed at the SLP conference in May) or, at best an 'ally' of the campaign being led by the RACs (MSR/PD, Red Republican, ISP position). The LWR group cynically regard any attempt to build a rank and file movement of workers as 'ultra-left' - much better, they say, to build a "campaign" around a few trade union and Labour Party officials willing to verbally commit themselves to the ever so radical demand for a public inquiry. Talk is cheap - it commits these people to no action, nor, significantly, to give any public support for action by rank and file trade unionists.

And yet, in spite of the all too obvious failures to make any impact or win anyone to TUCAR the removal of all political groups from the deliberations of the Central Relatives Action Committee in Belfast is a victory for Provisional Republicans. The failure of even one RAC in the North to publicly support the call by PD/MSR, ISP and IRSP for a democratic platform on the 8th October march in Derry was another. These groups refuse blindly to draw any political lessons. Worse, it has now reached the stage in Belfast where the democratic right of TUCAR members to express openly in TUCAR publications their views about the RAC's and the Provisionals is to be suppressed. And this from 'socialists' who claim they are serious about building a democratic workers' movement to defend democratic rights. No doubt Paddy Devlin and other TU bureaucrats will welcome the Belfast branch conversion to their time-honoured methods of silencing criticism.

At the heart of the argument about how to build TUCAR is the crucial question of which strategy can be the basis for not only constructing a movement which can end state repression, but also, in doing so, at the same time provides the basis for a workers' solution to the national question and the rule of imperialist capitalism in Ireland. A revolutionary marxist answer to that question challenges directly the methods, politics and goals of traditional republicanism. It is a political challenge which the left has repeatedly ducked, as can be most clearly seen in their refusal to face up to the existence of the RACs. While they may continue to bury their heads like ostriches or wriggle like eels to avoid their dilemma, the IWG fully intend to go on asking the question.

The following article is adapted from issue no. 6 of WORKERS POWER the journal of our fraternal group in Britain, Workers Power. While some aspects of the article apply only to (imperialist) Britain its substance is of enormous importance for socialists everywhere.

WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION AND THE WORKING CLASS

The systematic social oppression of women has its origins in a very early period of human development. Its roots, however, lie not in some "natural" or biological division between the sexes. There is no intrinsic connection between woman as child-bearer and her unequal position relative to men.

The reason for women's age-old condemnation to child-rearing, domestic tasks and exclusion from control of all the key areas of society lies in the period when class antagonisms, based upon the emergence of private property, broke up the primitive community. The male-dominated class societies, or patriarchies, seized from women the control of their own fertility, cast onto them the whole responsibility of childrearing (up to the age of 'manhood') and created a family within which women's productive labour was at the disposal of the 'patriarchs'. These basic features of women's oppression continued through the various modes of production - barbarism, slave-society, feudalism.

Custom, and later law, sanctified and enforced the enslavement of women. In these societies the patriarchal family emerged as the basic production unit. In subsistence economy and petty commodity production the whole family unit organised productive labour, although in both agriculture and food processing & manufacture, women had specialised roles.

The appearance of mercantile capitalism accentuated and developed this specialisation and allotted to women whole areas of domestic manufacture.

Industrial capitalism profoundly revolutionised the nature of human production and therefore the form of women's oppression. The family ceased to be the basic unit of production - being replaced by the capitalist factory and farm. The dynamic socialised production of capitalism broke up, with blind ruthlessness, the old form of the family. The skills gained in household work and in domestic manufacture, and the superexploitation and flexibility made possible by their oppression, made women an ideal major component of the workforce in emergent capitalism.

For the new proletariat the family was restricted to the function of reproducing the workforce and reproducing labour power. Within this family where husband and wife and even children from an early age were labourers and where 'property' was restricted to the basic necessities for subsistence, there emerged important points of contrast with the family of the bourgeoisie which was based on the control of women's fertility necessary for the preservation of property rights. The proletarian household had a more 'communal' appearance. However, under this appearance of equality existed continuing features of inequality - the insecurity and lower income of the woman proletarian, her intermittent condemnation to child bearing and rearing and the burden of domestic toil. Thus the proletarian household was and is partly a negation and partly an expression of the bourgeois family.

That it is, in the last analysis, the bourgeois aspect which predominates is due materially to domestic slavery and ideologically to the fact that the ruling ideas in any epoch are the ideas of the ruling class. Under imperialism, where a substantial upper stratum of the proletariat requires the income and security of a 'comfortable petit-bourgeoisie', the features of the bourgeois family are greatly strengthened.

This link with the bourgeoisie is weakened by women's presence in production and by every reform which tends towards socialising child rearing and domestic toil, but it can never be finally severed under capitalism. However, capitalism's need to use women as part of the proletariat (as 'free labour') undermined the basis for systematic legal inequality which had existed whilst the family was the productive unit.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS & THE WORKING CLASS

Thus, during the great bourgeois revolutions which broke the economic and political fetters on capitalist production, and which proclaimed the 'Rights of Man' saw also the proclamation, at least as a democratic ideal, of the Equality of Women. The continuance of legal restrictions on women, their right to own and dispose of private property, their right to vote, to hold state office, to marry, to divorce, to gain admission to education and the professions, to freely utilise all those methods available for control of their own fertility, were and are in clear contradiction to the proclaimed ideals of bourgeois democracy. The claiming of these 'equal rights' was and is the basis of the bourgeois women's movement.

However, the bourgeoisie, once it had used democratic ideology to lead other classes in society against the feudal aristocracy and thereby achieved its own emancipation, turned to bolstering its position as the ruling class. It thus attempted to deny to subordinate classes, particularly the working class, the use of democratic liberties which might assist the latter in its struggle for the overthrow of capitalism. Thus, from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards the working class became the spearhead for all democratic struggles. This was no less true of the struggle for women's rights. Whilst a minority of bourgeois women, and larger numbers of women from the lower middle class organised to claim equal rights, only the working class unequivocally embodied in its demands these basic democratic rights.

The onset of the imperialist phase of capitalism, with its tendency to militarism, Bonapartism and Fascism, accentuated the role of the bourgeoisie as the enemy of women's rights. Conversely it underlined the fact that the only class whose objective interests commit it directly to the maintenance and extension of women's rights, and whose class organisations possess the fighting strength to achieve this, is the working class.

Therefore we fight for each and every one of these basic democratic rights seeking to draw into this struggle the class organisations of the proletariat, utilising all the tactics of the class struggle and mass action.

CAPITALISM'S SYSTEMATIC OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

However, the emancipation of women cannot be achieved simply by the granting of Equal Rights. The roots of women's oppression under capitalism do not lie, as the bourgeois feminists claim, in political inequality. There is a basic contradiction between the formal democratic equality

of women and the systematic social inequality to which the nature of capitalism condemns women. The social root of this oppression lies as we have seen in the condemnation of women to domestic slavery within the family. Women are condemned to the roles of child rearer and principal performer of the labour necessary to reproduce labour power:-- cleaning, washing, cooking, shopping, care of the aged, and in short, housework.

Capitalism excludes this work from the system of productive labour. It is unable to permanently and systematically socialise it because:
(a) its performance can never be made into productive labour, i.e. a source of surplus value, and therefore would have to be paid out of a tax on surplus value, and because
(b) capitalism is a crisis-ridden system and cannot permanently retain in production all those capable of work, and women make up a (concealed) part of the reserve army of labour - the unemployed -, this drain on surplus value would be crippling.

Women perform these tasks, within the framework of the family, for a subsistence received from the male proletarian's wage. As capitalism provides no adequate security outside the family, this institution appears a fortress in a world whose fundamental feature is insecurity. Capitalism's inability to socialise child-rearing and domestic labour commits it to presenting this specific historic form of the relation between human beings, enshrining the oppression and exploitation of women, as the Natural Order of Things. The sexuality and labour of women is presented as naturally at the disposal of men. From this flows the hypocritical dual standard of Morality under capitalism - women's sexuality becomes not free expression of their personality but an object of men's pleasure. This involves a consistent psychological and physical degradation of women and an attempt via the church, education and culture, advertising etc. to convince men that their superiority is inevitable and natural and convince women that they must submit to this. This results in the sexual stereotypes and the branding of sexual and social behaviour outside of these as abnormal, unnatural, etc. It is the basis of the oppression of men and women gays and of the grotesque psychological traumas associated with the contradiction between the stereotypes and the reality of human relationships - from this flows the physical violence, rape, assault etc. to which women are subjected.

Women are either excluded from social life (locked away in the domestic household) or, where they are involved in social labour they are directed into areas of work closely allied to the domestic economy and its skills. Thus 'women's work' is predominantly in the fields of retail distribution, clothing, catering, care of the ill and the aged, cleaning etc. Where women work alongside men in factories and offices they tend to be restricted to the unskilled, semi-skilled and low paid sectors. Their education and training is designed to reinforce and prolong this 'specialisation'. Above all, the family is presented as the centre, the first responsibility of women, to which wage work is subordinated. In the isolation of the private household, woman becomes the victim and the agent of the dominant ideology of capitalist society. This is the source of women's tendency to conservatism, to domination by the reactionary ideology of the church and the state.

WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION AND SOCIALISM

For women to achieve full political and economic equality with men, the full socialisation of childrearing and domestic toil and the equal involvement of women in social production is necessary. This is inseparable from the overthrow of private ownership in the means of

production. Then and only then, will it be possible, on the basis of planned economy to systematically eradicate all the aspects of women's oppression, legal, economic and political.

To initiate this process, the seizure of state power by the working class, armed and organised into workers' councils, and the suppression of the exploiters' resistance is necessary. The tasks of the dictatorship of the proletariat include the socialisation of domestic labour, the drawing of women into production and the involvement of women in the political life at all levels.

The revolutionary communist party, the trade unions and a mass working class women's movement must play the central role in rallying and educating women for these tasks, and in struggling against the backwardness of male workers. The emancipation of women will not be finally achieved until the last vestiges, the last elements of 'superiority' or submission disappear in men and women alike. It is a task which will not be achieved 'at a single stroke' but will continue until the state and class disappear with Socialism and Communism.

But this means neither accepting oppression and exploitation in the interim, nor women waiting until the male working class liberates them by abolishing capitalism. Women not fighting for their emancipation are not merely absent from the class struggle but are a powerful factor on the side of the bourgeoisie. At the most elementary level, women unconscious of their own oppression are a force for inertia at best and for open reaction at worst (e.g. the press-sponsored 'Cowley wives' in Britain or the reactionary mobilisation of women in Chile).

Working class women are central to the struggle for the emancipation of both women and the working class. They are the most oppressed section of their sex and of their class. Amongst women they have the most radical direct interest in the overthrow of the roots of their oppression in capitalism. They cannot be for long diverted into restricting themselves to equal rights, opportunities or utopian schemes for sexual or psychological liberation. In the working class, they have no aristocratic craft privileges, no comfortable skilled status and high wages to reconcile them to capitalism, yet this intense experience of oppression is not enough to locate working class women as the spearhead of the struggle.

The working class is the first exploited class capable of ending all exploitation not only or not even because it is the most oppressed and exploited, but because capitalism itself organises it at the centre of socialised production enabling it to become conscious of itself as a class, to organise against and overthrow the capitalists and reorganise production. Women form a part of the working class with precisely this potential. Though capitalism has never been able to draw all proletarian women into production, though it has been able to use women as a reserve army of labour to be thrust back into the home in times of capitalist crisis and recession, women do form a vital component of the workforce and it is this section, partially released from the stultifying effects of domestic isolation who can act as the vanguard of all proletarian women. Firstly, therefore, we turn to those sections of women workers organised in the trade unions.

Capitalism is a crisis-ridden system from its inception. Imperialism increases the scale and depth of these crises - crises from which it can emerge only at frightful cost to the working class and oppressed peoples and strata - a cost paid in terms of unemployment, dramatic cuts in living standards and carrying the threat of fascist barbarism and war. In such periods the gains made by working people and the oppressed are savagely clawed back at the cost of untold misery. This occurs on one condition - that the working class leading oppressed peoples and strata, is unable to resolve capitalism's crisis at the expense of the bourgeoisie by seizing state power and organising the economy to meet human need.

After the Second Imperialist holocaust, imperialism was able with the collaboration of the reformist Labour, Social Democratic and stalinist Parties to overcome the post-war crisis and stabilise the metropolitan economies for over twenty years. Now however, a new period of crisis has hit the major imperialist economies.

The effects of periods of capitalist stability and crisis on women are profound. During the Imperialist wars (1914-1918 and 1939-1945) the military mobilisation of the male labour force necessitated the temporary waiving of the restriction of women to the home - public canteens, creches, laundries were provided. Women were admitted into engineering and skilled occupations normally reserved for men. The first Imperialist war was closely followed (in Europe) by a crisis and therefore by attempts to reverse the 'liberalising' tendencies of the war and its aftermath.

The second world war was not followed by such a crisis. Indeed, it saw a dramatic expansion of the economy - an expansion on a scale that required the drawing of women into the labour force on what appeared to be a permanent basis. At the same time, the expansion of the production of domestic appliances, convenience foods and the various provisions of the welfare state released many women from domestic drudgery sufficiently for them to take part-time and full-time waged work. Educational expansion and the rapid growth of the number of white collar office workers expanded the opportunities for women from the working class and lower middle class. To facilitate women's entry into industry and commerce and to avoid the inconvenience to employers that unexpected pregnancies involved, governments encouraged and tolerated the wider availability of contraception and even abortion. Ideologically this was accompanied by a 'liberalisation' of the norms of bourgeois morality, divorce, job opportunity, pay etc. None of this was granted without organised pressure - from women and from the Labour Movement. But it was granted as compatible with capitalism's long-term interest within a perspective of permanent expansion and boom.

The new period of crises on a world scale presents a sharp alteration of perspectives for the ruling class. Not the extension or even maintenance of reforms but their curtailment and contraction is now official policy. Incomes policy and inflation cut real wages. Cuts in public spending hit at housing, hospitals, nurseries and schools, injuring women as workers through the loss of jobs in those services, means heavy and heavier burdens in the home - caring for the young, the sick and elderly.

Unemployment strikes particularly sharply at women who are often unorganised or weakly organised to resist redundancies. Women are losing their jobs twice as fast as men. Even in strong unions the 'first in last out' principle works to women's disadvantage, given their child rearing breaks in employment.

Attitudes of male trade unionists - 'women out first' - 'women only work for pin money' - often block the use of the full strength of the union to fight women's unemployment. The present extremely limited and circumscribed right to abortion*(in Britain) is under constant attack and has become the focus of 'women as mother' agitation from that fountain of obscurantism and women's oppression, the Catholic Church. Yet the last ten years has seen a tremendous awaking and renewal of agitation amongst women. This has taken two forms - not originally connected - the Women's Movement and the involvement of working-class women in trade unions and trade union struggles. The former has affected mainly lower middle class and white collar working class women and has centred its struggles on questions related to women's oppression via her sexuality. The latter has on the other hand been limited largely to questions of equality of pay, conditions, unionisation and resistance to unemployment. (An area of partial overlap is in the area of hospital and nurseries closures, in Britain.)

As we have seen, women in socialised labour outside the stultifying isolation of the home, have the potentiality for vigorous struggle. (In Britain the Ford Machinists, the Leeds Clothing workers, the Night cleaners, hospital workers and Tricos have over the last years shown tremendous ferocity in struggle.) These workers hold the key to building a mass movement of working class women.

If the onslaught of the ruling class against women engendered by the deepening crisis is to be resisted; if the working class is to mobilise to defeat the overall attack and mount a counter offensive, both the women's movement and the trade unions cannot be left as they are; they need to be radically restructured and ideologically transformed. This will not be done by abstract theorising but by fighting to win working class women active in the trade unions and socialist women active in the women's movement to a common Action Programme which links the fight against the attacks of today to the inseparably linked goals of the emancipation of the working class and women. To this end we have drawn up the outlines of what we consider forms the basis for such an action Programme.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND WORKING CLASS WOMEN

But a programme is nothing if it is not the rallying point for a movement - a strategy nothing without an army. It is essential to build around such a programme a mass working class women's movement. How does such a movement relate to the Women's and Trade Union Movements of today? The women's movement of the 70's contains a whole spectrum of tendencies. Socially its strongest roots are amongst the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia.² As a result both bourgeois Feminism and revolutionary communism are in a tiny minority within it.

There are two major tendencies in the Women's Movement in Britain today:- Radical (or revolutionary) feminism is explicitly anti-marxist in that it rejects the class struggle, replacing it with a struggle by all women against patriarchy. Socialist Feminism, while it recognises the necessity for socialism to liberate women, makes a number of fundamental mistakes. Firstly it accepts the integrity of the 'women's movement', i.e. of an all class alliance involving bourgeois and petit bourgeois feminists. In fact the former are enemies and the latter

*In Ireland, for 'abortion', read 'contraception'.

²The weakness of this stratum in Ireland is reflected in the failure of a women's movement to grow here relative to its size in Britain.

unstable allies of working class women. Secondly, it is unwilling to orient centrally to working class women in general and to organised women in particular - mistaking this orientation for Economism; thirdly it insists on the political autonomy of this all-class movement, i.e. of its independence from the marxist class programme as embodied in a revolutionary party. Within Socialist Feminism there are therefore, strong exclusionist tendencies with regard to the left groups. These tendencies are fueled and exacerbated by the appalling record of some of these left groups, sexist attitudes, real economism etc., features which characterised groups like the WRP (associated with the Workers' League in Ireland) and the IS (now SWP, linked to the Irish SWT).

The IMG (British section of the USFI which has 'individual members' in the new Peoples Democracy in Ireland) has, on the other hand, abandoned the marxist position on women's emancipation in the direction of a capitulation to Socialist-Feminism. Their position of espousing the "political and organisational autonomy of the Women's Liberation Movement" is the abandonment of both the Marxist programme - justified on the excuse that the WLM is a 'social' rather than a 'political' movement - and an abandonment of proletarian women to an auxiliary role within it.

The attempt to either preserve the 'Women's Movement' as a whole as an ally of the working class or to develop socialist feminism as a 'class struggle' leadership of the Women's Movement is doomed to failure. Women are not, as the IMG claim, an ally of the working class. Half of the working class are women. Women are not a separate class like the peasantry whose attachment to private property but hostility to feudal landowners makes them a potential ally, but does not make them a part of the working class. Women - no less than men - are divided into classes and whilst working women will support democratic rights fought for by bourgeois women (provided they do not conflict with the immediate or strategic goals of the working class) they will not join in one movement with these 'enemy sisters'.

Women from the petit-bourgeoisie or the petit-bourgeoisified intelligentsia are a different matter. These must be won to the programme of the linked emancipation of the working class and of women, to orientate to and involve in working class organisations, parties and unions, and to build a mass working class women's organisation. If feminism however socialist, is incapable of mobilising working class women whilst it clings to the idea of a non-class women's movement, so is the perspective of 'women's trade unionism' or of a movement built on economic militancy alone, such as the SWP envisages.

Trade unions are essential defence organisations for the working class under capitalism, but, divorced from politically conscious class leadership they tend to restrict themselves to the 'more easily' organised workers and these tend to be skilled or semi-skilled male workers. Moreover, under imperialism a powerful and reactionary bureaucracy has established control of the unions, severely limiting and trying to extinguish democracy within their ranks. This bureaucracy has settled its 'social question' via high salaries, permanency of office and integration to the lower levels of the capitalist state. Hostile to the overthrow of capitalism they are also hostile to the emancipation of women. All this makes the unions organisations which in their structure and in the attitudes of their officials and their members, mirror many of the sexist attitudes of male chauvinist bourgeois society. Mere involvement of women in trade union struggle or in the hidebound bureaucratic structures of the unions are incapable of substantially altering this situation.

If women are to join and play an active role in the trade unions to be fully involved in the struggle for their immediate demands and final emancipation, and those of the working class as a whole, it is necessary to adopt a fighting strategy and specific forms of organisation to overcome the bureaucrats and transform the backward attitudes of male workers. Women in the trade unions must have the right to caucus separately at every level - not in order to split men and women workers but in order to work out their demands, plan their interventions in meetings, choose and prepare candidates for positions in the unions. This right to caucus must exist without detriment to women's full rights as trade unionists. ** Women's conferences including the Women's TUC (which must be won from the bureaucrats' stranglehold & democratised by making its voting basis a lay delegate one) must have the right to present and prioritise their motions and resolutions to the appropriate Trade Union body on which they should have an allocated representative, without prejudice to women standing for other posts.

Union meetings in worktime on full pay is a demand which is not only vital to women given their family commitments but will immeasurably strengthen union democracy and fighting power for male workers also. To achieve these aims unofficial caucuses must be built to fight for them. These women must work in the closest collaboration with any rank and file anti-bureaucratic opposition in the union. It is the duty of the latter to assist women to win the right to caucus, to support women workers' demands on pay, conditions etc. On the question of conditions, rank and file and women's caucuses must fight to commit the union to free creche facilities under shop-steward and users' control, to positive discrimination in favour of women in all apprenticeships, training schemes under trade union control.

FOR THE REBIRTH OF A MASS WORKING CLASS WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

There is, in fact, a tradition of organisation of working class women independent of the bourgeois women's movement which has been obscured by the degeneration of the Social Democratic and 'Communist' Parties into reformism. Before World War One, the Social Democratic women's movement, influenced by the pioneer Marxist work of Engels and Bebel and led by figures like Clara Zetkin, stood on the left wing of Social Democracy, and played an important role in opposing the war (whilst bourgeois feminists almost to a woman became rabid chauvinists). The same current later contributed to the founding of the Communist International and Communist Women's Movement. After the departure of the revolutionary working class women, the reformist Social Democratic women's movement withered into a pale copy of the Liberal Women's Rights Movement.

The Russian Revolution and the workers' state which it created, immediately granted women all the political rights so long promised, and so often withheld, by bourgeois society: freedom of divorce, abortion, etc. It also systematically, within the objective limits of civil war, famine and economic devastation, set about releasing women from domestic slavery. Its gains here were necessarily limited but still placed it ahead of any capitalist state in the world. The triumph of Stalinist reaction put this process of liberation into reverse, the family was

**Too often women's sections or women's conferences including the women's TUC have been used to isolate women, used as an excuse to abrogate their rights.

was actively restored to its central function of reproducing labour power and surrounded by a 'socialist' halo. Restrictions on abortion were reintroduced, the role of motherhood glorified and gays persecuted. The world influence of stalinism within the workers' movement helped to blight and destroy the Communist Women's Movement, founded in the early 20s, so that by the Second World War, hardly a trace of it survived.

It is to the tradition of the German and Russian revolutionary working class women's movements that we look - not because we can slavishly copy all their positions and actions, but because they present an invaluable experience of working class women's leadership in the struggle for the emancipation of all women. It is also necessary to reassert the marxist positions developed in those movements against the capitulation of social democracy and stalinism to bourgeois positions on women. We fight today for the rebuilding of such a mass movement of working class women.

This mass working class women's movement must be rooted in the unions, in the workplace, but its fighting strategy must by no means be restricted to economic issues or to the sectional interests of 'working women' alone. Its programme must be one of struggle against all aspects of the oppression of women under capitalism - against all attacks on abortion and contraception rights, against the physical violence suffered by women of a capitalism in crisis, rising prices, rents, the closure of hospitals and nurseries etc. A working class women's movement would give a lead in these struggles. Such a movement would be involved to the hilt in all the mass working class organisations.

Within this movement revolutionary communists should fight for their programme and for leadership against the reformists, feminists and centrists. But the movement should be organisationally independent, having its own democratically elected leadership. Revolutionary communists have nothing to fear from such democracy. To the reformists and centrists and 'socialist feminists' we say, 'Join us in the struggle for a working class women's movement. Let us put the correctness of our politics to the test in action, in the struggles of, and alongside working class women'. To women from today's "Women's Movement" we say, 'You will find no tendency more intransigently dedicated to the struggle for women's freedom. We will not yield an inch to economism, to male chauvinism in the unions, but, we insist, only the mass forces of working class women provide a basis for winning the final and complete emancipation of women.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

For Marxists, a coherent strategy for the seizure of power by the working class (-a programme-) is inseparable from organised militants fighting for that programme and applying it tactically - a party. The question of women's emancipation is itself an integral part of that programme and women communists an integral part of the party - both in its leadership and rank and file cadre. Such a party must fight sexism in its own ranks, amongst militant workers and in the working class at large. To do this it must take special measures to strengthen and support women within the party and the class. The right to caucus, the provision of creche facilities etc. are vital to this end.

Whilst these rights must be guaranteed, we reject absolutely the view that the democratic centralist party is inimical to the full participation of women, that women must organise separately and exclusively 'their struggle' because they alone have subjective experience of their oppression.

Whilst the latter is a vital component of working out strategy and tactics, women's oppression and its relationship to class society was not discovered by subjective experience alone (any more than was working class exploitation). It was, is and will be analysed by scientific work for which the party as a whole is the necessary vehicle.

Since correctness, both in the struggle for women's liberation and for socialism, is verifiable only in practice, the practice of organised masses, party struggle, is vital. Thus in a mass working class women's movement parties should openly struggle, subjecting themselves of course to the norms of democracy. Those groups who, on the pretext of non-sectarianism or respect for the autonomy of the Womens Liberation Movement, disguise their members as 'individuals', arouse only suspicion and mistrust. Therefore, we state openly and clearly our positions as a group, deceiving no one.

We fight for:

A WORKING CLASS WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

and for A REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST TENDENCY IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT.

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